

PROCESS THEOLOGY AND STORY
IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

by
Earl Wesley Guy

A professional project
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
The School of Theology at Claremont

June 1977

This professional project, completed by

Earl Wesley Guy,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Allen Moen

David Griffin

April 16, 1977
Date

Joseph C. Hargis, Jr.
Dean

TO KAY
The best of wives,
editors
and
counselors,
without whose steadfast love,
skill and wisdom
all this expensive 100% rag, 20 lb. paper
would have someone else's project on it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem.	1
Theses	6
Limitations.	6
Definitions.	7
Development.	9
Summary.	10
2. STORY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE.	12
The Role of Stories.	12
The Greek Story Cycle.	17
The Traditional Christian Story.	19
Modern Problems with Story	24
Liberal Protestantism and the Traditional Christian Story.	31
Summary.	37
3. PROCESS THEOLOGY AND STORY	39
The Process Story.	39
Process and the Church	47
The requirements of love	48
The community of love and the church	52
The relationship of spirit and forms in the church.	56
The transforming power of love	60
Summary and Conclusions.	63
4. THE CHURCH AS A STORY TELLER	68
The Problem of Inert Ideas	68
The Place of Education in the Church	70
The Role of the Church as a Storyteller.	72
About Stories.	73
Four Principles of Christian Education	79
A Pattern for Religious Instruction.	85
Summary and Conclusions.	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY	101

ABSTRACT

Each of us lives out of a story which relates us to the values we hold. This project examines the problems of liberal protestants confronted by conflicting world views. The seemingly incompatible demands of faith and critical openness create a dilemma for liberal protestants who seek to live in the modern world, yet still find meaning in the faith of the traditional Christian story. Two theses are set forth to address this problem. 1. That Process theology can provide a theoretical framework for a functional, modern story for liberal protestants. 2. That this story, and the methodology of story telling, can be adopted to influence the educational life of liberal protestant churches to provide meaning and direction for the life of the church and for the lives of its individual members. These theses are explored through three major areas.

1. The traditional Christian story has served as the basic myth, or reality ordering story, for Western culture since its rise to dominance over the cyclic Greek story pattern. In modern times, however, this story has failed to provide an adequate grounding for all our experience of the world. In particular the concept of an all-powerful, transcendent reference point has been undermined, and much of the believability and motivating power

of the story has been lost. Liberal protestants, with an awareness of the values of both the modern world and the message of love in the traditional Christian story, are faced with the task of discovering a consistent, new understanding of the story to ground their lives and faith.

2. The Process story is presented as a synthesis of the modern world view and the essential message of the gospel. This story offers an evolutionary understanding of the creative work of God. God brings the world, and all that is in it into being through a persuasive process of love which leads toward the actualization of ever higher levels of value. Humanity arises out of this process as does human social structure. Human society follows numerous paths, one of which leads to the life of Jesus, through which we find the decisive self-disclosure of God in human form. Out of Jesus' life, and what follows it, emerges the church, which serves as the "body of Christ," active in the world today and bearing the message of God's love. It is that particular form in history which seeks to actualize the community of love. This is an unfinished work, a people struggling with the requirements of love and seeking fulfillment in the hope of the transforming power of God's love.

3. The story form helps us relate our lives to the experience of God's love. The story of that love, in its fullness, includes our lives. This is the message of good news we share in Christian education. The educational task

of the church is to present its message, as it has been interpreted, with awareness of the fallibility of human minds. The message, though historically conditioned, does have contemporary meaning for life. Hence, Christian education finally is education for decision and action, wherein the gospel message is given formative power in life, and is manifested in observable changes in the actions of our lives.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Each of us lives out of a story which relates us to the values we hold.¹ A believable, consistent story provides us a foundation on which to take a stand in the world and reach out beyond ourselves. For many liberal protestants today, such a story is hard to come by. The traditional story of the Christian faith offers a source of value and meaning but, in many aspects, is in tension with the modern, technological world-view. Liberal protestants, in an effort to maintain a stance of critical openmindedness to truth from many sources, find themselves confronted on both sides. How can one live in a rational, secular, technologically oriented world and still maintain faith in a loving, value-producing God who offers hope to persons? This dilemma impairs the vitality of liberal protestantism by undermining the motivation and commitment needed to meet the challenges facing the church and its individual members today.

An example of this problem presented itself to me

¹John B. Cobb, Jr., Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 31.

a few years ago when I was working with senior high youth at a United Methodist church in Southern California. Working with this youth group was really a very pleasant experience, for the most part, and I count it among my happiest memories in the church. I was working with other competent leaders. The group itself had a sense of cohesiveness and ownership and seemed interested in what we, as a community of youth and adults, were doing. It was as close to an ideal youth group as I have ever worked with. Even so, the other counselors and I would often spend Sunday evenings after the meetings discussing what, from our perspective, was wrong with the group.

Two things emerged, one at the time and the other only fully as I have struggled with this project. First, it occurred to us that we had been passing on a life-style that emerged out of our own faith, but had failed to pass on the faith, and the power it provides, to undergird that life-style. We had helped some people in the group to acquire some of the tools and skills to be loving persons, but we had failed to help them discover why to love or where to find the power to love in difficult situations.

Second, there has been a slowly growing awareness for me of why we did not do that. Each of us involved in the leadership of that group could identify our own roots in the Christian tradition, but likewise each of us were aware of a rejection of unquestioned acceptance of traditional Christianity, its concepts, demands, and rituals,

as we had experienced them through the church at large. In that particular church we had discovered people more concerned with people and with learning love than with orthodoxy. This left us with the position that Christianity is ok, "the church" is not ok, but this church is ok, mostly. We would not share our faith and its roots because we expected it to be rejected. Why shouldn't we? We had rejected much of it ourselves.

As I have reflected on this since, it seems to me that a still deeper problem was involved. The problem was not so much that there was something wrong with the church but that we had allowed a particular, unacceptable view of the church and of Christian faith to become our definitive reference point. Further, and still more serious, we had no adequate awareness of a means within the context of the church for recovering and recycling those messages, basic to Christianity, to which we felt indebted. We did not know how to make faith make sense in the latter half of the twentieth century, in spite of the fact that we felt its importance in our own lives.

John B. Cobb, Jr. examines this problem as it confronts liberal Christianity as a whole. "We liberals," notes Cobb, "have come down the road from historic Christianity progressively using up the capital of our heritage and doing little to replace it."² Standing on the foundation of historic Christianity, liberals have adopted a

²Ibid., p. 12.

critical attitude toward their own tradition, placing an openness to truth and value arising from an awareness of multiple traditions above the claims of the Christian faith alone. To be sure, this has led to important advances in scholarship and understanding of the history and nature of the Christian tradition. Like wise, however, the "spiritual capital," the power of faith, has been undermined, and little progress has been made to fill the need for a well-grounded source of faith for liberals which can withstand the scrutiny of our self-critical attitude.

We are at a point of decision, says Cobb, whether to move toward a decisive commitment for some traditional statement or toward an openness which denies the final authority of any tradition, or to take a third, more uncertain option of moving ahead in a spirit of openness while maintaining a commitment to act on such partial truth as we have.³ Neither of the first two options offers much hope that liberal Christianity could survive and maintain its integrity. The third option, however, is the most difficult, as it requires the development of a positive sense of identity based upon a shifting, dynamic understanding of authoritative truth. What is to hold such a tradition together? Already liberal churches are under criticism for their over-identification with contemporary

³Ibid., pp. 12-14.

movements in secular culture. What is such a tradition to affirm as its identifying mark? A church that identifies itself by what it does not believe may achieve a high level of intellectual honesty but has little survival value. The survival of liberal Christianity as a meaningful movement requires that it find the necessity of its existence in the gospel. We must be able to state who we are and why we are who we are in terms of the demands of the gospel message.

The task before us, then, begins to take shape. Liberal Christians, more specifically liberal protestant Christians, who are my primary concern, must rediscover the gospel and find ways to communicate its message. This communication must be meaningful in terms of contemporary needs and world view. The message must be faithful to the good news, open to its continuous unfolding and adequate to engage in dialog with the world of our experience. Likewise, the message must lead us, as individuals and as a movement within the Christian tradition, to a sense of identity which provides the integrity of self-understanding and the open purposiveness of participation in the continuing work of love which is not finally tied to any particular world view. To accomplish this task we shall need a theology which can relate the continuing good news to the changing world. Likewise, we will need to find a way to revise our story to provide a believable, consistent synthesis of the truths we perceive in the modern world and the traditional Christian story. This synthesis should

provide us with a new story which we as liberal protestants can know and share as our own--a story that recalls our history, that provides us with paradigms for action, and that offers us a source of faith by which we can find reason and power to live and die.

Theses

The actual accomplishment of these goals is the job of the liberal church and its individual members. This project offers two theses which I believe are of potential value in this task. First is that we find in Process theology a theoretical framework for a functional, modern story for liberal protestantism. Second, this story, and the methodology of story telling can be adopted to influence the educational life of liberal protestant churches to provide meaning and direction for the life of the church and for the lives of its individual members.

Limitations

There are limitations to what can be accomplished in a project of this size. It would require volumes to examine all the background and implications of the issues represented in these two theses. I have therefore determined to focus my examination within the boundaries of four broad limits. First, the theology of story is an interesting, growing and fruitful area of study but it will not be my purpose to examine it, or its implications exhaustively. I

will, rather, focus on the tools available in story terminology and on the anthropological and educational functions of stories. Second, Process theology is based on a distinct philosophical system. This project works with a number of the assumptions of that philosophy, but it is not the purpose of the project to examine them or analyze the manner in which they are applied to theological concerns. Third, this project is not an attempt to write stories or curriculum materials using Process theology. Fourth and finally this project is not an analysis of any particular existing curriculum materials or specific theory of Christian education.

Definitions

There are several definitions and clarifications of language usage which will further help to focus what follows. In response to a growing awareness of sexual discrimination, inclusive or non-sexist language will be used throughout the project. This will consist of two types of changes: elimination of male pronouns to refer to humankind, and elimination of male pronouns to refer to God.

The term Process theology denotes a school of theology arising primarily out of the work of Alfred North Whitehead. A number of theologians have since developed the theological implications of Whitehead's thought. The first to attempt a systematic Process theology was Daniel Day Williams, whose interpretation is the major one used

for this project. The work of two current Process theologians, John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Griffin will be the principle supplements to Williams. The term 'Process' when referring to Process theology will be capitalized to distinguish it from other uses of the word.

The word "story," in its simplest form, means any narrative sequence of events. The major interpretations of the functions of stories comes from the work of John Crossan, Sam Keen, and Mircea Eliade. The concept of truth in stories is dealt with in some detail in Chapter 2 in the discussion on the functions of story. Stories as described in this project can be divided into five forms, using the classification system of John Crossan.⁴ These types or modes of story are classed on the basis of their relation to the world. First myths, which will be the major story form dealt with in this paper, are stories about things that are true. Myths concern those things which create the framework of reality for those who find them valid. Hence myths are stories that create and establish the world. Second, apologues are stories that defend the established world. Third, actions are stories which explore and describe the world. Fourth, satires are stories that attack the world. And fifth, parables are stories that subvert the world. Parables compose the opposing pole to

⁴John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975), p. 9.

myth by posing irreconcilable conflicts which require their resolution in a new myth.

The term "liberal protestantism" does not refer to any clearly defined denominational stance. Rather it refers to the self-understanding of those persons, groups and local congregations within a variety of protestant denominational bodies which focus their world view through critical evaluation of, and openness to, the truth of multiple traditions rather than through a dogmatic adherence to a single view.

The terms "traditional Christian story" and "Process story" are explored in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively.

Development

The theses are developed in three further chapters. Chapter 2 examines the function of stories in primitive and modern cultures, and the essential need for stories in human society. It also examines the problems that have arisen with the concept of story in modern times. It focuses in particular upon the problems of liberal protestants in relation to the traditional Christian story, the need for a new interpretation of that story to carry the essential messages of Christian theology, the gospel, and the relationship of liberal protestants to those messages.

Chapter 3, *Process Theology and Story*, begins with an examination of the Process story as a workable synthesis

of the traditional Christian story and the modern world view. It follows this with a more detailed look at four aspects of Daniel Day Williams' systematic Process theology which are of particular value for understanding the church and illuminating the task of religious education. This portion of the chapter covers the requirements of a loving community, the church and the community of love, the relationship of spirit and forms in the church, and the transforming power of love.

The project concludes with Chapter 4, The Church as a Storyteller, which examines some possibilities for practical application of Process and story in the local church. The chapter explores some problems and opportunities for education in the church. It examines the educational use of stories and the church's role as storyteller in its educational ministry and a look at four educational principles which define this ministry from the perspective of Daniel Day Williams. This is followed by a proposed general pattern for religious instruction in a local church setting including goal setting, implimentation and evaluation. The chapter and project is concluded by a brief summary.

Summary

In this chapter we have looked at some problems arising from conflicting world views confronting liberal protestantism. The seemingly incompatible demands of faith and critical openness create a dilemma for liberal protestants who seek to live in the modern world, yet still find

meaning in aspects of the traditional Christian story. The chapter sets forth two theses to address this problem.

1. That Process theology can provide a theoretical framework for a functional, modern story for liberal protestantism. 2. That this story and the methodology of storytelling can be adopted to influence the educational life of liberal protestant churches to provide meaning and direction for the life of the church and for the lives of its individual members.

In the next chapter we will look at the use of story as a way of defining our world view. We will seek to identify some reasons why the traditional story and the modern world view no longer fit together in the experience of liberal protestants. And, we will search for some criteria for a workable synthesis on which to base a new, adequate story.

Chapter 2

STORY AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

The Role of Stories

Each of us is a part of many stories. Most of these we take for granted, giving little thought to their origin, form, or meaning in our everyday life. Yet they do have forms that distinguish us as members of this or that culture or group, and they do have meanings that reflect our origins and move us in particular directions. In the search for a modern story out of which liberal protestant Christians can live we will need to examine these functions of stories to discover the human requirements for an adequate story system. Likewise we will need to examine the problems of the traditional Christian story to see why it can no longer reflect the actual situation of the modern liberal protestant.

We may begin with a brief look at stories in general and their particular functions in premodern or archaic societies. For this purpose we will begin with the categories of John Dominic Crossan, who identifies five principle modes of story.¹ These story modes describe the

¹John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval: Toward a Theology of Story (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975), p. 9.

relationship between the story forms and the world they describe. The chaos of experience is ordered and explained in myths, hence these may be called stories which establish the world. Other stories, called apologues, defend this established order, demonstrating its truth and adequacy. Action stories examine the order of the world, describing it and adventuring within it. These first three forms act to affirm the world view presented in the basic myth. When a myth fails in its ability to organize the experience of its people, satires may arise which attack the world of order and make fun of its shortcomings. Lastly, parables are stories which subvert the order of the world by generating conflicts which are irreconcilable within the framework of the existing myth. Satires and parables, then, offer challenges to the validity of the basic myth. These five forms or modes of story do not necessarily follow sequentially or in isolation from each other but taken together provide the dynamic of a living story system.

Such a system finds its root in its myths, those stories which order and explain the world as a foundation for the rest of the system. As we shall see, it is primarily a problem of out-worn myths that plague our modern story structures. We have largely misunderstood this function of myth in western technological culture, believing that myths are simply "untrue" and therefore uninteresting outside the area of anthropological study. Serious study of myth, within the last fifty years, has shown that, among the

people of archaic societies, myths are clearly distinguished from fiction, or invented stories, and are considered true in the sense of being sacred, exemplary and significant for life itself.² It should not surprise us that we do not see the value of these myths since such "true stories" can only be understood, in their truth, from within the proper context and therefore are not to be recited to uninitiated persons.³ Clearly this constitutes a different understanding of truth from that we use in the historically-oriented, technological west. In the archaic sense, myths are true because they describe the primal, sacred acts of supernatural beings through which their sacred powers are manifested. For those seeking to live in harmony with these powers, the myths become the paradigms for all significant human activity.⁴ Thus we see that mythic truth is not concerned with historic truth in the modern sense but with the relationship of human beings to the powerful forces around them. Myths, in this sense, are true insofar as they deal with the actual realities of life and offer a means for human understanding and relationship to them.

This view of myth helps to clarify how the story system of an archaic society might serve to provide the

²Mircea Eliade, Myths, Rites and Symbols (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), I, 2-3.

³Ibid., I, 5.

⁴Ibid., I, 4.

structure for the major portion of its social, religious and intellectual life. Persons in such a society could identify themselves through the distinctive stories of their people, which would locate them within the structures of the cosmos, the community, and the family.⁵ Likewise the stories of one's people would offer role expectations, define values, and offer justification for those actions needed to maintain the life of the community. These paradigms and justifications arise not simply because of the example of the story but because the story shows how roles, values and right actions are rooted in the scheme of things and are sanctioned by the sacred power that brings reality into being.

A community must maintain itself not only in terms of its internal social relationships but also in relation to the external world of nature and the cosmos as a whole. Here myth combines with human action in the ritual and ceremony of religion, which involves the participants in the experience of the myth. By means of a system of religious acts the members of archaic societies are able to discern the structures and rhythms of natural forces and theoretically to gain some form of willful control over them.⁶ This is accomplished by reaching back into the primordial time to work with the sacred forces behind

⁵Sam Keen, To a Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 87.

⁶Eliade, pp. 6-9.

the profane world, an activity made possible by belief in the accessibility of the sacred time through the reenactment of the myth.⁷ This belief is strange to our Judeo-Christian traditions. While we tend to locate reality in one directional, temporal terms, in the archaic concept reality is located in sacred power which manifests the reality of the sacred realm through myth and the transformation of profane objects.⁸ Through recitation of a myth one's own power is understood to be enhanced by contact with the sacred. Thus through the use of sacred objects and the enactment of myths the archaic individual is able to recall the sacred time of the beginnings and communicate with the forces that act upon his or her life.⁹

It is difficult, if not impossible, for those of us who experience reality in terms of history and linear time to understand how the world looks from this archaic perspective. Yet we are not separated from the needs which give rise to this world view. The myths and other stories of archaic peoples provide them with an understanding of where they have come from, who they are, and where they are going. They define the structures and hierarchies of nature and society that justify values and organize experience in ways that enable the emergence of new, creative perspectives.¹⁰ Further, they enable the solution of conflicts and paradoxes

⁷Ibid., p. 139.

⁸Ibid., p. 141.

⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 140.

on a symbolic level which would be impossible to deal with in the world of experience alone.¹¹ These are still problems we struggle with, though our approach to reality and power are different.

Still, we should not imagine that we have totally left all archaic views behind us, or that to do so would necessarily be desirable. There are two great story patterns that have contributed to the modern, western view of reality. One, the Greek, is characterized by an archaic, cyclic view of time, while the other, the Judeo-Christian, views reality in terms of a linear history. An examination of these story patterns may help us to understand the reality out of which we now live and prepare us to examine the problems which have arisen with the stories of our own time.

The Greek Story Cycle

Sam Keen, in his analysis of the Greek story pattern, divides the archetypal story into four acts which, together, form a cycle. This cycle forms a structure which can be discerned not only in Greek myth and drama, but also in the "demythologized" Greek philosophy.¹² Act one of the cycle may be termed the "Spring." This is a time of innocence and newness, full of vitality and promise

¹¹Crossan, p. 51.

¹²Keen, pp. 89-90.

of great things to come. The true nature of the promise of the future is hidden, yet the outcome, the "telos," is contained in the beginning. In the hope and vigor of the Spring there is no knowledge of death, but death is there, unseen and waiting. Act two is the "Summer and Fall." This is the time of maturation, the realization of promise, and also of disillusionment, the falling short of hoped for fulfillment. In this stage the tragic aspect of life becomes clear. The vigour and flexibility of youth begins to fail, options close, and the bright hopes of the Spring turn now to anxiety and fear that they shall never be renewed. Act three is the time of "Winter," the time of despair and death. The promise of life comes to be seen as an illusion and gives rise to hopelessness. Darkness closes in as the realization grows that death has always waited at the end of life and there is no escape from its triumph. Act four is the "Return to Spring," the time of resurrection and the renewal of the cycle. Although the time of rebirth is a constant part of the cycle, it always comes as a surprise and a gift. It is always new. It continually reenacts and celebrates the rebirth of the cosmos out of chaos.

Seen as an archetypal structure, the Greek story form is far less alien to us today than when we encounter it in its concrete forms, populated by supernatural beings in a sacred realm. We can still appreciate the debt this story has to empirical observation of the rhythms and cycles

of nature in which all our lives are deeply rooted. Our own scientific understanding of the world owes much to this mythological drama as a foundation for observation. Likewise the cycle of human life and emotion is depicted here in ways to which we still respond, for the anxiety about death and the hope of a renewed Spring are still powerful motivations in modern life.

The Traditional Christian Story

Keen's dramatic structure provides us with a framework in which to view the traditional Christian story. Unlike its Greek counterpart, this story does not assume an eternally repeating cycle. Arising from the Jewish vision of time, this drama passes only once across the stage of history.¹³ Even so this is a drama of many parts, all of which fit into the form of a common plot, which provides a form for the numerous sub-plots of the story, such as our human lives.

This story has a distinct beginning which we might call the "Prelude." There is no eternal stage on which the drama unfolds so the world must be created. Hence, God creates the world and all that is in it by the sheer force of divine will. All that is created is empowered and set in order by God. Thus God is the sole author of the Christian story. The human performers on

¹³Ibid., pp. 91-93.

this created stage of history are made as a separate act of God. They are created in the world but are only partly of it. They are related to the rest of creation only by divine will. Human beings do not, and cannot, know why they are created. They only need to know how to perform their role in a story which has its basic setting determined from the beginning.

Act one we might call the "Garden." It is a time, not unlike the "Spring" of the Greek cycle, when innocence and harmony prevail. There is no tragedy in life since it contains the resources for its own fulfillment in harmony with the intent of the "author." The tensions and discord arising out of sexuality and death are alien to the story. In this last point we see a distinction between the two story forms. While the Greek "Spring" contains the teleological seed of death within it, the "Garden" does not. Neither death nor regeneration are a part of its nature. Hence these enter human existence as strands alien to the intentions of the "author."

This strange intrusion is dealt with in act two, the "Fall." The "Fall" acknowledges the seemingly unexplainable mystery of evil which throws the story out of its intended path. Humanity must bear responsibility for the evil of sin, since persons rebelled against God and insisted on telling their own story. This is the birth of historical time. Our historical existence is the time when, in the midst of conflicting themes of self-centeredness,

God seeks to salvage the intended story through the imperfect dialog and actions of the wayward performers. Those who hear and respond to the call of the "author" receive signs and covenants assuring that God will again gain control of the story and bring it to its intended fulfillment.

Act three is the "End." Someday the story will reach its conclusion and the "author's" purpose will be made manifest. Although humanity is seen as having rebelled against the subservient harmony of the "Garden" and as struggling against the despair of unrealized promise in the "Fall," the inevitability of death is finally conceded in the "End," just as it is in the "Winter" of the Greek story. At last human beings cannot struggle anymore and must surrender their will to God.

There is no fourth act, as such, in the traditional Christian story because it has not happened yet, remaining only a promise. For the Christian, the promise of new birth and the renewal of harmony for those who have surrendered their will to God is to be found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In Jesus, God becomes present as human flesh to atone for human sin through Jesus' passion. The manner in which Jesus' death accomplishes the reconciliation of God and humankind is a mystery of faith. The promise of the resurrection is the breaking through of the coming "Spring." It is not, however, a return to the "Garden" as it was. Now the "Garden" is in the midst of a

city, the Kingdom of God. Historical time never returns to exactly where it began.

The traditional Christian story has altered our understanding of reality. Beginning with the story of the Jews, the story of a localized people, it has changed our understanding of time. For the Jews the manifestation of the sacred occurs in linear time, and these manifestations are not repeatable.¹⁴ The celebration of the great events of the Exodus, for example, are commemorations rather than attempts to return to a sacred time in order to contact its power. The power of God is experienced in profane time, as sacred revelation, the intervention of God in the human story to return humanity to the divine purpose. In Christianity the historical event of Jesus is interpreted as the ultimate manifestation of God's revelation. Thus by interpreting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as historical events occurring in profane time, but bearing a sacred message, the model for the modern understanding of history begins to emerge. Liturgical time becomes linear rather than cyclic in the Christian concept of reality.

This understanding offers a degree of freedom from the cycles of the natural world, throwing human dependence instead onto the revealed word of God. However, we should not imagine that the Christian story has thus become freed from cyclic reality altogether. We can still see a cyclic

¹⁴Eliade, p. 75.

influence in at least two areas. First, we see it in the concept of pilgrimage. This is the period of our historical existence, occurring between our archetypal fall from the Garden and our hope beyond the End. For the Christian, life has meaning and hope because of the repeatable example of Christ's life which offers models for action, and the periodic renewal and recovery of communion with this super-human model through the sacraments.¹⁵ Second we see the residue of a cyclic view of time in the Christian myth of return. As noted, the Christian concept is not a return to the beginning of the story but a return to its intended conclusion, from which we have strayed. Even so, this hope is expressed in universal symbols which point toward the same archetypal experience as that pursued in archaic cultures, the return or re-entry into paradise.¹⁶ In the Christian myth, however, one does not seek the sacred as a means of direct return to paradise but seeks it as a corrective force to restore the possibility of an intended future.

This brief glimpse at two major strands in western thought is only a cursory attempt to examine them as contributing to the dominant story structures by which western culture has emerged into modern times. Our focus is not to stay with them but rather to push on into recent times to see how they, and the concept of story itself has run into significant problems with the coming of a truly historical

¹⁵Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

and technological society.

Modern Problems with Story

In terms of story, we might say the modern world began at the point where the traditional Judeo-Christian story ceased to fascinate and entertain its listeners and new stories, which reflected humanity's growing interest in the non-transcendent world, began to capture the human imagination.¹⁷ The new stories are narratives of events in profane time but carry only tenuous, if any, sacred meaning. Even so, the great historic stories of our time retain the basic plot of the traditional Christian story form--innocence, fall, and the struggle for the recovery of innocence. This form is to be found in the ideologies of both communism and American democracy.¹⁸ Thus the fascination with profane history and technological manipulation of the world has left much of what we call myth behind.

Still, we cannot say we have moved totally beyond mythology in our recent modern world view. A recurrent theme in successful, modern social movements is a belief in the necessity of struggle and the certainty of final victory.¹⁹ In this view we see lingering mythological

¹⁷Keen, p. 93.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁹Benjamin Zablocki, The Joyful Community (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 29.

elements and also the origins of some of the significant problems of modern historical myths. The cases of American democracy and of communism illustrate these problems.

First, in neither case has the ideological projection of manifest destiny or certain victory proved true, and the likelihood of eventual success grows increasingly improbable. Second, the value of struggle is made questionable by the improbability of success. In addition the very definition of what constitutes effective struggle or victory in a cause is uncertain in a world with a multitude of historical perspectives.

Without a transcendent reference point the motivation provided by an historical myth is seriously impaired. In the traditional Christian story this motivation is provided by God, who ultimately determines the outcome of history. Secular myths, which follow the form of this traditional story, may not use the idea of obedience to a transcendent God for motivation, but they do substitute some notion of "the good" which has universal application, and toward which one can strive with confidence that one is on the "right side." The mythological concept that right will eventually win out is in operation here. When the universality of the motivating principle is called into question, the myth which had explained the world becomes an apologue to defend a particular aspect of some larger world view, or simply a part of the random passing of events.

Hence in some situations the success of a technological mentality has produced an "ahistorical" attitude which threatens to undermine the function of even historical stories as a source of purposeful identity.²⁰ Our natural environment has been de-mythologized to the point where we now see only objects to be manipulated where once our ancestors saw sacred presences and our modern identity has become based more on the ability to perform productive tasks than on the remembering of value producing stories.

The rejection, not only of myth, but of story as a metaphorical form to provide a context for identity is a phenomenon of this century. What has emerged in place of the story form is the "non-historical event", or "happening," which relies on chance and probability to define its reality and denies the validity of the dramatic paradigms of story. This view accepts physical causation but rejects the idea of reason behind events or of a guiding mind which orders the cosmos.²¹ Again we see how the loss of a transcendent reference point undercuts the utility of story. If this loss is so devastating to the traditional modes of self-identification and ascription of values and purposes, why has it happened? Why hasn't western humanity retained its transcendent God?

Sociologist Peter Berger sees an answer to this

²⁰Keen, p. 86.

²¹Ibid., p. 94.

question in terms of political and economic realities.²² Western culture, notes Berger, arose in a political world dominated by two great institutions, the church, and the state. While each of these had its own vested interests, both were concerned with the maintenance of a single world view. This view was the traditional Christian story, politicized to be sure, to sustain the claims of each institution to power. The tension between these two institutional forms was pushed to the breaking point by the rise of commercialism and nationalism which produced a new political and economic order. While the church attempted to hang on to the old Christian mythology the state pursued an increasingly technological world view based on a "demythologized" rationality. This new economic and political order developed its own bureaucracies and ideologies in support of its world view. Finally the breach between the religious and secular views could not be bridged without dismantling the rational foundations of modern society. This created a crisis of credibility in the religious sphere in that it was now possible for many competing, conflicting world views to exist openly side by side. The basic universal myth of Christendom provided a less and less satisfactory basis for the ideologies of the modern world. Religious ideology became increasingly only "rhetorical ornaments" for the realities of political and

²²See Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969)

economic life.²³ In this environment a transcendent reality became not only difficult to define but increasingly irrelevant. Of course, the pattern of events which Berger describes as leading to this point are vastly more complex than this short sketch. Even from this brief account, however, we can see that the rational, critical analysis of our underlying mythical structure, and the existence of competing stories of reality, have resulted in diminishing credibility for the traditional mode of defining ourselves, and our values by the "universally" accepted traditional Christian story.

What, in fact, has been lost here? If we still believe that our reality is organized, explored and defended by the stories we tell, then what we have lost is the notion, or at least our ability to talk consistently about the notion, that somewhere beyond our immediate experience there is a God who defines the limits of our story from a perspective beyond history. This God has provided a fixed center, beyond the limits of our historical stories, and it is this God which the modern world has declared dead.²⁴ This conclusion has serious consequences for human self-understanding, for ultimately the statement "God is dead" is a statement about humanity. Perhaps what it finally says is that modern human beings cannot believe anymore that their lives are made ultimately meaningful

²³Ibid., p. 133.

²⁴Crossan, p. 45.

by being incorporated into a story.²⁵ However, if the story form is essential to meaningful human life, this answer leads us to despair. Hope lies in the possibility that we can discern elements in our traditional story and our modern world view which can be combined into a new, functional myth.

There are three questions we might now ask to aid us in this process: 1. Do we actually need stories for meaningful human existence? 2. Is it possible to discern a new mythology out of contemporary culture which permits a reestablishment of contact with some reference point beyond ourselves? 3. What can we find in our own experience that matters enough to demand communication?

The first question is the most basic. Is there anything about being human that actually demands that our lives be cast into story form? Our answer must be yes! Human life is by nature composed of event-to-event relationships which are serially ordered and episodic. If one's actions are to be informed through learning, or if insights are to be gained from projections and comparisons, the event relationships and the episodes must be recalled and organized.²⁶ This is one meaning of story. To be human is to have a story, and to participate in many stories. Even to envision an ahistorical humanity whose

²⁵Keen, p. 86.

²⁶John S. Dunne, The Way of All the Earth (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 160.

reality is defined by happenings, is itself a form of story. Lauren's Van Der Post sums up the answer to this question by way of reference to the Bushpeople of the Kalahari desert. He says: "These people knew what we do not: that without a story you have not got a nation, or a culture, or a civilization. Without a story of your own to live you haven't got a life of your own."²⁷

Second, we may ask, "Out of these essential stories can we discover a new mythological structure, a new grounding for our stories, that permits some reference to meaning and value beyond ourselves?" It is my view that we can, though a full exploration of this answer must wait to be developed in chapters three and four. At this point we can only outline the demands that our analysis places on myth. A myth which serves as a grounding for our understanding of reality cannot simply be invented. This would be more the realm of fantasy. The myth we are looking for must be discovered, in our existing understanding of the relationships of people and the world. Hence we must look at, and account for, contemporary human experience in our mythology. Out of this realm of experience we might discover patterns of action and qualities which we can identify as good and thus motivating, even when extended beyond the sphere of our own interests. In so far as possible we need to seek an understanding of reality which exemplifies and universalizes this good. Lastly we must examine the evidence

²⁷Keen, p. 87.

available to us of the existence of such a reality, how we are affected by it, how we affect it, and what its relationship is to other realities in our pluralistic world.

Third and finally we ask, "What, out of our stories, is significant enough that we feel compelled to share it with others?" If nothing in our lives is worth passing on in some form, our lives do not have meaning. Likewise to have meaning capable of being passed from one person to another implies that at least conceptually, the source of that meaning must transcend the individuals. Thus we see that the answer to this question supplies much of the content for the answer to question two. Again we must look to chapters three and four for a fuller examination of this content, but for now we can identify it in terms of three forms of relationship essential to human existence as we know it. First, I matter as myself, distinct yet in relation to everything else that is. Second, relationships themselves matter as the foundation for meaning and value. And third, possibility of future, positive relationships matters as the source of hope. The specific content of these relationships will offer a glimpse of who we are as participants in, and tellers of, our own story. They form a distinctive perspective on reality and locate us in relation to others in our myth.

Liberal Protestantism and the Traditional Christian Story

If we are to discover a story foundation for liberal

protestants, the particular challenges which liberal protestantism presents to the traditional Christian world view must be added to those already considered. The words 'protestant' and 'liberal' can assist us here. Protestantism shares the historical traditions of Christianity's formative years, but significantly differs in its ecclesiology from the Roman Catholic view. If we draw a parallel here between the sacramental practices of the church, in relation to the mediation of God's power, and the ritual practices of archaic societies, in which the myths are symbolized or re-enacted as a means of contacting the sacred realm, we can see that the alteration of the church's ritual, especially as related to the sacraments, must have some significant effect upon its relationship to its founding myth. In part this was intended in the protestant rejection of the church's pretension to power beyond that granted by its mythological base. However, the protestant reform in fact altered, or recognized an emerging alteration, in the myth itself. This is not to say that protestantism rejected the teachings of the Bible or Jesus. These are not identical with the myth, which is the story that contains these things in an orderly world view. What the protestants challenged was the sense of continuity between the experienced world of objects and the unseen world of sacred power and purpose.²⁸ This process narrowed the

²⁸Berger, p. 112.

perceived channels of relationship to a single channel of divine intervention, the "Word of God," in an otherwise secular world. The Catholic view had maintained a rich communication between the seen and unseen worlds through miracles, intercession of saints, and the use of a sacramental system which covers most of the significant events of human life. The protestant system, by contrast, reduced the sacraments to two, stripping away most of the mythological power even of those that remained, and channeled all divine revelation and manifestation through the single path of the "Word of God." The protestant world view, with its greatly restricted interaction with a sacred realm has been especially vulnerable to the forces of secularization, which finally threaten to cut even the final link which protestants maintain in God's self-disclosure through the Word. Thus we see that one task of the protestant story is to maintain our connection with the self-disclosing work of God while avoiding the excesses of a system which denies validity to the rationalistic world view of modern technology.

The liberal branch of the protestant tradition is characterized by its approach to the problem of authoritative truth. The liberal protestant is one who, in the words of John B. Cobb, Jr., is "committed to openness to the truth that comes from multiple traditions and new

discoveries in the present and future."²⁹ This is yet another step in the process of secularization. The truth is no longer seen to be contained within the single mythology of the Christian faith but may be found in numerous places. The critical question that thus confronts the liberal church is, where can one take a stand? The practice of openness demands continuous criticism of one's self and of one's society. In particular, one must be most questioning of those movements with which one identifies most closely. This can be seen as the operation of the prophetic principle in the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁰ In so far as this is true we are on solid ground. Liberalism runs into problems however, when its openness leads to a paralysis of action, and a failure to believe strongly enough in anything to sustain a commitment. Even an uncritical look at our world today reveals the desperate need for action to ensure the very survival of the human race, to say nothing of the vast richness of culture and of other life on our planet which is threatened by human presence. A significant demand for the liberal protestant story, then, is how to maintain an open, critical attitude toward truth while still experiencing the truth we encounter as a motivating force for positive action in life.

²⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

In this we discover problems with both our sacred and secular views of the world.

Here we may find some value in returning to the idea of story as such, to discover what has happened to liberal protestantism. We recall that there are three basic "world affirming" story forms, myths, apologues, and actions. The foundation for all the forms rests on the myths. Thus within a story structure apologues tend to be stories with conclusions we already know, in some sense, from our knowledge of the myths on which they rest. Actions are stories about things we do not entirely know but which fit the presuppositions of our myths. All of these story forms provide some affirmation for their listeners because they tend to confirm and expand their world view. The principle myth system for western society has been, and to a large degree still is the traditional Christian story. In recent times, however, some significant aspects of this myth have been abandoned or called into serious question by the forces of secularization, technology, demythologization, and pluralism which in turn have produced a variation on the basic patterns of this myth so as to eliminate or disregard its transcendent elements. From the standpoint of the church, that institution in society which has concerned itself with this aspect of the myth, this has produced a crisis. This problem is especially intense where the forces just mentioned have been the most integral to institutional function, the liberal protestant church.

The stance of openness undermines the anthropological functions of the myth as a fixed reality. Thus the repetition of the sacred myth no longer produces a sense of identification or motivation, for many of its hearers. The myth assumes the form of an apologue, a defense of itself, yet it is in fact a defense of a reality which is no longer experienced by its listeners. The myth in this situation may or may not be seen as untrue. Its basic problem is that it is not interesting. It is dead. On the other side, the acceptance of an attitude of critical openness which is not grounded in the reality forming myth leads to action for its own sake. The story of technology, ungrounded in myth, transforms progress into a pointless series of events, a groundless action story.

If the position of liberal protestantism is implausible, arising from inadequately grounded apologue and action stories, and thus inadequate to meet the needs of large numbers of liberal protestants, to say nothing of others, we might assume one of two things. First, that our position is an accurate representation of who we, as liberal protestants, are. Hence, we would have to acknowledge that neither of our traditional myth systems, secular or sacred, is adequate to define our world. In this sense the liberal protestant position itself functions as a parable in both systems confronting them with the irreconcilable differences between them. Parables, however,

are tools of change, not stories out of which one can live. Second, we might say that our position is a misrepresentation of who we are, having created tensions out of the formal acceptance of aspects of the sacred and secular trajectories within our history which in fact are not a part of the experienced reality we live in. If this second option is true then a new understanding of the traditional Christian story, from a liberal protestant perspective, should produce a new myth which conforms to the facts of experience and in which the sacred and secular strands of the story are compatible. If we fail in this we are left to derive meaning and purpose for our lives from two conflicting myths. This leaves us an inconsistent, ineffectual story which would paralyze our effective activity or result in the disintegration of liberal protestantism into numerous narrow interest groups.

Summary

In this chapter we have examined some of the anthropological functions of stories. We noted the various ways in which stories relate persons to a world view. We explored our relation to two major story systems in Western culture, the Greek and the traditional Christian stories. The problems modern persons experience with the traditional Christian story were then examined, with particular reference to the loss of meaning, relatedness and purpose that have occurred with the abandonment of a concept of a

universal, transcendent reference point in God. The chapter reaffirms the need for story forms in human life and explores the particular needs of liberal protestants who seek to affirm values from the traditional Christian story, while accepting the modern technological world view. The chapter concludes that we need to discover a synthesis of these perspectives in a new myth, offering an understanding of the modern world which grounds our experienced reality, gives meaning to events and motivation for actions.

In the next chapter, Process Theology and Story, we will examine the Process story as a workable synthesis, and explore some aspects of Process theology as they inform and illuminate the task of expressing and communicating that story in the church.

Chapter 3

PROCESS THEOLOGY AND STORY

The Process Story

Liberal protestants stand at a crucial point between the modern secular world and the world of the traditional Christian story. Our modern world needs faith in the influence of a value-producing reality beyond technological utility. The traditional Christian story offers this reality in God, yet it also carries a weight of baggage from antiquated world views that tend to make the whole message unacceptable to many modern minds. Liberal protestants, from a position of openness to the truth of multiple traditions, and a willingness to analyze truth claims critically, have the opportunity to glean essential messages from both world views while setting aside the unnecessary accumulations of outworn concepts and imagery. It is my view that the Process story, and the theology behind it, in large measure accomplishes this task and offers us guidelines and tools for effective, dynamic implementation of the gospel message in the service of the aims of God.

The Process story offers us a synthesis of the sacred and secular stories which predominate in liberal protestant thought. It accepts the existence of the

natural world which functions lawfully and can be technologically manipulated. It also accepts that there is a God who creates the world and provides meaning for events. In a broad view the Process story is a drama of only one act, "The Process." Its beginning and end, if indeed, there are such, are lost to us, not in some sacred time, but simply in the time of passing events beyond the reach of our memory and hope. The plot is the unfolding of the ever-changing forms of the created world evolving in response to the call of God.

The evolutionary process occurs as the response of the material world to God's activity, yet God's actions do not absolutely determine the concrete realities which emerge.¹ The process is a mutual relationship. Unlike the traditional view, in which God is the author of the creation story, the Process story recognizes God as an interacting participant in the creation. The world itself, or rather the creatures which compose it, have some degree of power and being of their own. God interacts with the creatures in each moment by providing each an impulse to fulfill the most ideal possibility it could actualize in that situation.² In each occasion the creatures respond, not only to the persuasion of God's call but to all the influences which present themselves as data out of the past.

¹David Ray Griffin, "Philosophical Theology and the Pastoral Ministry," Encounter, XXXIII: 3 (Summer 1972), 239.

²Ibid.

The creatures respond to these influences by attempting to create, from the data of the past, enjoyable experiences for themselves.³

The aim of God in the process is understood to be two fold:⁴ First, there is God's ideal or general aim of increasing value in the world. Greater value here is interpreted as the result of greater levels of complexity which involve increased potential for intensity of experiences, for harmonization of these more intense experiences, and for fuller self-determination in selecting the data out of which present experiences are composed. Evolution, then, is the means by which higher values can be actualized and through which we can discern the ideal aim of God seeking expression in the world. Second, there are the specific aims of God. These are the aims which God presents to the creatures in response to each actual occasion. These aims are not absolutely ideal, in the sense of the general aim, but are the best real possibilities which can be actualized in a particular set of circumstances.

Thus evolution has progressed in response to God's call through a vast history which has seen chaos turned to a structured universe, life emerge from inanimate matter,

³John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 25.

⁴Griffin, p. 239.

consciousness arise out of life, and self-awareness come from the increasing complexity of conscious awareness.⁵ This is where our human drama begins, not as a separate creation but as a step in the continuing actualization of God's general aim. Human beings emerge as distinct from the rest of the known creation in their ability to conceive of their own identity and to create complex symbolic realities, but we remain a part of the natural, still-emerging order of things. We are not perfectly what God would have us be, nor are we the end of creation. Like all creation, humanity is the product of ages of small decisions, for and against God's aims.

Persons are, none the less, remarkable beings, loved by God and urged by God to use their complex awareness and high degree of self-determination to share in the creative process. Unlike the traditional story, humanity is not created complete and in ideal harmony with God in a "Garden" setting. Rather communion with God is a still emerging reality. Our human story begins with the slowly developing awareness that we are "something." The "Fall" is not an historic event in which human beings rebelled against God. Rather it is that point in our awareness when it dawns on us that what we are now is less than what the creative power of the universe calls us to be, as participants of a universal community of love. Our awareness of

⁵Daniel Day Williams, God's Grace and Man's Hope (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 51.

what we are, and what we are called to be, produces anxiety in human beings. We seek to be whole, but fear the risk involved in full response to God's call. Hence we seek wholeness in our own resources and partial fulfillments. This is sin.⁶

Sin enters the world in the "Fall" because the "Fall" is the source of the anxiety which drives us to seek our full potential outside the aims of God. Since we are self-aware, and largely self-determining in our actions, we bear guilt for this turning away. In the matter of guilt, the Process story is not unlike the traditional one in that human beings must bear responsibility for turning away from God. However, the Process story resolves the problem of God's involvement in the actualization of evil.⁷ In the traditional story, God empowers human action and there is no final source for the power of evil other than the God who has determined the reality of the story. In the Process view, however, God's action always comes from a loving will for the best possibilities to become realized. Evil arises out of unresponsiveness to, or decision against, God's will by creatures with real power and being apart from God.

God's general aim for the creation is not changed

⁶Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 146-147.

⁷Griffin, p. 239.

by our failure to actualize God's specific aims in our lives. In each situation God uses all that has occurred before to present the best real possibility available.⁸ The effects of evil and sin are real in our lives but God works with these realities to bring about new good. As new circumstances and ideas emerge in our lives, new possibilities for good become real.⁹ We can choose to actualize those possibilities for ever greater good and thus participate with God as co-creators, or reject them and perhaps actualize ever greater potentials for evil. The choices we make change the circumstances of the world and thereby condition the expression of God's general aim in the specific aims presented for each situation.

We can see this process at work in human life in the area of ideas and beliefs. What a person believes is true, or possible, conditions the kind of experiences that person can have and, thus, the kind of real possibilities which can be offered by God. The person who believes that God acts for good in history, for instance, is more likely to be motivated to act in response to divine influence.¹⁰ Conversely, the person who does not believe in God would tend not to be responsive to this influence.¹¹ The effectiveness of divine causality is conditioned by the structures of belief and expectation current within an

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 243.

¹¹Ibid., p. 242.

individual or a society. Where persons expect and accept the influence of God and have some understanding of God's general aim, that aim can be more directly achieved in human affairs.

In this way, human social and cultural evolution can be seen as an extension of the whole evolutionary process out of which the cosmos, life, and humankind have emerged. In human society ideas and social structures provide a foundation for new value-producing possibilities in an on-going, though imperfect, response to God's aim. We see God's persuasive influence present in all human society; however, it is clearer and more influential in some places than in others. That is, in some traditions of human experience the initial human response has been more nearly what God's general aim sought than in others.¹²

In the Judeo-Christian story we see the action of God in history moving toward God's decisive self-disclosure. Here we see a people who accept that they are chosen by God to carry a vision of divine action in history, chosen to live under the judgment of a law that binds them together in an ethical community that drives them beyond the narrow confines of their own people. The chosen people come to recognize that their god is God, the one who has brought all things into being and who draws the people toward the hope of universal community. Yet the Jewish

¹²Ibid., p. 241.

hope, or at least a major interpretation of it, is frustrated in Jesus, who bears the message of the kingdom. It is not the restored kingdom of David he brings; rather it is the message of the kingdom of love.

Christ lives out the life of love and reveals the nature of God's relationship to humankind. Jesus, the man, uses his will to live in unbroken communion with God.¹³ God takes account of the times and circumstances of Jesus' life to reveal the life of love and brings it, as a model, into history. Upon this model, and what it reveals of human sin and of divine love, God seeks to evolve the community of love. Jesus, the Christ, becomes the decisive revelation of God for humankind. He is, in the perception of his followers, fully transparent to the ideal aim of God for human life.¹⁴ Christ reveals to humanity the meaning of the life of love and demonstrates that, even in the midst of our guilt and failure, the God who made us loves us and seeks our love in return.¹⁵

In the traditional Christian story we find some of the same problems that befell the Jewish story. If God is all-powerful, how can we account for the suffering of God's servants and messengers? In the traditional Christian

¹³Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 165.

¹⁴David Ray Griffin, A Process Christology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 216.

¹⁵Williams, God's Grace, p. 55.

story we ask, "Why did God have Jesus die? When will God set things right and overcome evil so the righteous can live in harmony?" In the Process story, Christ's death does not ransom us or appease God as the traditional story often portrays it. The death on the cross is not God's plan, but a demonstration of the magnitude of human sin and the lengths to which love must go to overcome sin and bring good out of it.¹⁶ The Christ, who lives out the life of love, must die in order to remain faithful to the demands of love in the face of human sin.

The transforming power of God's love is demonstrated in the resurrection. This is not primarily a miracle of Jesus' return from physical death, but the miracle of new life in his followers who experience his presence and the power of the love he lived.¹⁷ The experience of the Christ makes new possibilities for the life of love real in all of history which follows. The community which grew up around the hope made real in Christ is the church, whose task is to preserve and celebrate the memory of Christ, and make manifest the hope that springs from the aims of God which build upon that memory.

Process and the Church

In Chapter 4, we will examine some specific ways

¹⁶Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 182; see also Griffin, Process Christology, p. 220.

¹⁷Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 169.

in which the Process story might influence religious education. Prior to that, however, it will be important to examine some aspects of the theology behind the Process story in more detail. In particular, we will need to see how Process theology envisions the church. For this, we turn to the theology of Daniel Day Williams to look at four areas of his systematic Process theology with particular relevance to the educational task of the church. These are, the requirements of love, the church and the community of love, the relationship of spirit and form, and the transforming power of God.

The requirements of love. In the Process story, God has created humanity by persuasively working with the world to bring about beings with self-determination and responsive awareness. Through this human awareness we are able to grasp some significant idea of God's creative action in love. Love is an essential aspect of being and our human experience of love can inform us about the way God works and about the divine relationship to humanity.¹⁸ In his analysis, Daniel Day Williams identifies five conditions for genuine love.

First, love requires a community of beings in relationships.¹⁹ This means that for love to exist, it must exist between real, distinct beings who are able to take account of one another in their individuality. Love cannot

¹⁸Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 114.

destroy the uniqueness or the selfhood of either the lover or the loved. To love is to take account of another and risk change without seeking to absorb the beloved or surrender one's personal integrity.²⁰ If God is involved in love in the world, then God too must have the integrity of an individual being, and be real in the same sense as other beings. As creator, God is not best described as 'being itself' or 'the ground of being' but as 'being which is the source of the community of beings.'²¹

The second condition for love is freedom.²² Love involves us in uncertainty and risk if we truly give ourselves. Love requires that we accept this risk and affirm the freedom of the loved one. We can will to be loved by the other but we must also will that he or she have the freedom to choose to love in return or not. Love cannot be coerced into existence. This applies to God as it does to persons. God seeks the response of every creature and participates in shaping every human destiny, yet always runs the risk of our refusal to return the divine love. God also is free, indeed is the exemplification of freedom in love, yet this requires that God affirm the limited, but independent, freedom of persons. Thus, in love, freedom is never absent, or unconditional, for either God or human beings.²³

²⁰Ibid., p. 115.

²¹Ibid., p. 126.

²²Ibid., p. 115.

²³Williams, God's Grace, p. 127.

Third, Williams states, love involves action, some form of movement toward the other.²⁴ Further, this action is responsive, allowing one's actions to be shaped by the other. Here the transforming power of love is experienced. To love one must experience suffering, in the sense of being acted upon and altered by another. Love conforms one to the other in a mutual limitation of freedom which both preserves the freedom of the individuals and creates a new life between them. This being conformed to the other provides the deepest communication of one spirit to another. It is the language of feeling and caring which is shared both by persons and by God. God acts in the world in awareness of human experience and is in some sense conformed to it. This conformity may challenge the completion of God's aim for a specific occasion, and call forth a response from God in terms of new specific aims for future occasions, but it never changes God's ideal aim.²⁵

Fourth, love involves causality.²⁶ All human life involves habitual or mechanical cause-and-effect relationships. Love, however, involves causality which takes account of one's own free will and expresses concern for the freedom of the other. Love enters into the processes of decision and transforms motivation in response not only to the past, but also to the possibilities for the growth of

²⁴Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 117.

²⁵Ibid., p. 128.

²⁶Ibid., p. 118.

genuine love in the future. Love precludes absolute determinism and takes account of hope as a source of motivation. God, therefore, is the "supreme determinant of the nature of things," not the sole determinant.²⁷ God continually addresses the world, offering the creatures the highest aims to which they can aspire. Yet each being has some power of self-determination to decide whether or not to respond favorably.

Fifth, and finally, Williams asserts that love requires impartial judgment in loving concern for others.²⁸ Genuine love demands the full functioning of rationality which seeks to know the truth concerning the human situation, including that of the lover, the beloved and their relationship. Love demands that we know ourselves and others as we really are. This requires our continuing commitment to self-discovery, discovery of others and critical reflection on the standards available to us in the structures of human existence. In our awareness of the ideal aim toward which God draws us, we are provided with a standard against which we can measure the goodness of our actions. This standard changes in its specifics because it is expressed in response to our human circumstances, yet it always points the way toward the real good of God's aim. Thus, we can truly hope for equity,

²⁷Williams, God's Grace, p. 44.

²⁸Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 120.

justice and forgiveness only as we come to love the fullness of God's purpose more than any of our own.²⁹

In the educational task of the church these five requirements of love offer guides not only for content but for the process of education itself. They describe the conditions for the existence of a community of love which should guide the church in the formation of its communities. They point to basic human needs which can contribute to the church's understanding of its ethical task, both in its own actions and as it reflects upon the world. These requirements point to those aspects of our lives and relationships which are central to our fulfillment and the realization of God's aims. They define the power of the community of love in its dynamic relatedness.

The community of love and the church. In William's theology, the community of love is that toward which the story moves. This community is only partially realized yet it is represented in certain ways by the church. The church is a cultural entity which has followed a path of evolution in which not only the aims of God but the actions and failures of human beings have become manifest.³⁰ While the church is not the concrete actuality of the community of love, it is that body which, in its best responses to the call of God, acknowledges that ideal community as God's

²⁹Ibid., p. 122.

³⁰Griffin, "Philosophical Theology," p. 241.

aim for human fulfillment and accepts that ideal as its own goal.

The church is the new form in human society which emerges out of the experience of those who share the hope of new life revealed in Jesus Christ. The essential message of the church, states Williams, does not depend on any one particular interpretation of the events of and following Jesus' life. Rather the church's message is found in the relationship between Jesus' willingness to surrender his life for the sake of persons who had turned away from the community of love, and the action of God who worked within the human situation to demonstrate the trustworthy power of love.³¹ The church as a body in human society has the image of Christ as its head and bears, in its body of members, structures, and traditions, the message of that image for all humanity. The church is a part of the continuing creative work of God's atonement. In the concrete actions of individual believers, this takes form in the emergence of new possibilities for relationship to God and fulfillment of human life in community.

The church is reminded of its origin, its message and its limitations in the repeated re-enactment of its own history through the drama of seasonal festivals and observances, the sacraments, and the retelling of its story. These express and recall the love which binds the community

³¹Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 189.

together into one body. They celebrate the action of God in the continuing re-creation of the possibility of genuine communion in love, decisively present in the life of Christ.³² The will for communion, to which the church responds, has both self-affirmation and self-giving as essential aspects.³³ The will to belong finds its true fulfillment in the community of the church, for Christian existence is, by nature, an experience of relatedness, rather than one of isolation.³⁴ It is one body with many members, a kind of family which shares not only a mission to the world, and an acknowledgement of human weakness, but also a celebration of the strength and delight that comes with participation in the new humanity.³⁵ Ideally, the church is people being really together in the depth and fullness of their lives. Thus it is able to address all aspects of life, relating them to remembered, present and anticipated work of God's reconciling love.

However, the church's work must always remain under the judgment of universal love, which means that no particular form, no mode of action can be absolutized as the

³²Ibid., p. 154.

³³Ibid., p. 136.

³⁴Ibid., p. 188.

³⁵Daniel Day Williams, File Heading: "The Church--Doctrine I," (unpublished notes, Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont nd.)

exclusive means of mediating grace. The church does not possess grace, not is it the sole movement in history with a valid claim to be its vehicle. Indeed, God's redeeming love is not confined to any particular movement in history. The church, however, is understood as a form which has grown out of the work of the spirit of love and which gives that spirit new opportunities for expression within and beyond the boundaries of the community of the church. The clarity with which this form reveals the love which brought it into being can thus be judged by the universality of its openness to the reconciling action of love arising from all quarters and by a sense of humility about its own claims to exclusive possession of the spirit of love. The failure of the church to actualize the community of love in human society is the reason why it must always participate in grace by seeking forgiveness.³⁶ Yet this is not to discount the church as a powerful reality, reflecting the accomplished work of God's love. There is a sense in which the church does already exist as the community of love, even with its hypocrisy, failure and limitation. This reality is not in the actuality of the community of love itself, though churches do often manifest loving communities, but rather in the actuality of a people who bear the message of that community's becoming. The church participates in God's creative work which offers the fulfilled life of

³⁶Williams, Spirit and Forms, p. 189.

loving communion as a potential which has already become a real possibility. The fact that the church has not, and indeed might never, fully, manifest the community of love in human society does not diminish the reality of the church's mission, or of its identity as a people coming into being under the judgment of love.

The relationship of spirit and forms in the church.

Throughout the Process story, we see the evolution of new forms out of old in response to the action of God's spirit. The church, involved in the social evolution of history, is also evolving in response to the call to manifest the community of love. The dynamics of the institutional church's relationship to the call of God are expressed, says Williams, in the interaction of spirit and form. Form, in this relationship, is a system or regularizing of procedures which is realized in, and imposed upon, a living process.³⁷ Spirit is that which calls life beyond its forms, offering novelty, direction, and purpose to a process. In concrete realities, including those of the church, form and spirit are always linked by some aspect of a four-fold relationship.³⁸

First, form can act as an expression of spirit. Spirit brings form into existence; this is the meaning of

³⁷Daniel Day Williams, File Heading: "Doctrine of the Church" First Folder, (unpublished notes, Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont nd.)

³⁸Ibid.

creation. The lure of new possibilities of greater harmony and intensity of experience draws forms of being toward greater order and complexity. The church emerges as a social form which expresses the lure of the spirit through history, ritual, drama, and the celebration of existence. Form can also express the rebellion of the spirit against preceeding forms. The church expresses the judgment of love upon itself and its culture and participates in the formative work of creating new good through innovation, renewal and reform. Forms provide concrete symbols of the spirit's aim and exert causative power on other forms.

Second, form can protect the spirit. A purely inward religion, for instance, would lack the forms of structures to carry the experience of the past. Since the spirit works by building on the cumulative experience of the past, the values which have emerged from previous occasions would be lost without the conservative functions of social ritual and structures. Therefore, forms serve as repositories for the achievements of the spirit so that they are available as objective data for the present. The existence of the recorded and formalized action of the spirit offers us the opportunity to follow the trajectories of its action out of our past and project them into our future. We see, for instance, the meaning of the community of love symbolized in the act of Holy Communion, which preserves and makes available to us the action of the spirit in bringing that community into being.

Third, form can act as a barrier to spirit. This is the action of inertia which crystalizes and externalizes the movement of the spirit. The good once embodied in a form becomes absolutized as a "fact" rather than a responsive relationship between action and the achievement of the highest possibilities offered by the spirit. We become attached to specific ways of doing things, forms of worship or church structure which support the limited fulfillment of our being and we build barriers against the threat of change. It is a fine, and often confused, line between forms that preserve and forms that impede the spirit.

Fourth, form can act as the conditioning agent of spirit. The spirit shapes itself upon the world, being called out and molded by what it finds there. The spirit does not act with disregard for the actualities of the world but acts in response to them. The state of the church, the interests, skills and knowledge of its people, the kind and quality of its commitments alter the choice of possibilities which are available for the spirit to work with. The best possibility, the one which finally can produce the greatest advancement of mutuality, can only come from among those made possible by the forms of actuality in any situation.

We can see the spirit at work in these ways in the life of Jesus, whose message and life bore the decisive self-disclosure of God. The spirit entered into the circumstances of Jesus' life and times to provide its message

in ways which were responsive to the conditions and expectations of Jesus' day. In religion, law, and scripture, the forms of life in Jesus' time preserved the expectation of a deliverer who was to come and save the people. They maintained an ethical standard which could serve as a basis for a universalizing of community. And they carried the expectation that God acts in history, often with unexpected results. In many instances, however, these forms had become rigid, self-serving and unresponsive to the call of God, and served as a barrier to the work of the spirit through the life of Christ. Yet even in the defeat of Jesus' death, the spirit worked to bring about the new form, the church, which would preserve the new disclosure of God, in Christ, for the future.

Throughout history, spirit and form are products of their relationship to each other. In fact, says Williams, history itself is the record of the "treasuring of form, and yet the shattering of it."³⁹ Hence, the church must always be prepared, not to eliminate the values of the past, but to find new, and more inclusive forms to express those values as the community of the church is enlarged and new values emerge. With this understanding, the church can change in form and still remain the church so long as it does not lose sight of its origin and the power of God's forgiving, reconciling, suffering love which calls

³⁹Williams, File: "The Church--Doctrine I."

it together. The church, as the body of Christ living and working in contemporary society, carries on his prophetic, reconciling mission, not as Jesus would have done it, but as the church today, responding to current issues with current resources drawn out of the long history of the church's understanding of God's creative, transforming love. It is a community, still in the process of becoming, which continually seeks to reach beyond its own forms and limitations to enrich and universalize the experience of the spirit, harmonizing and fulfilling life in its relatedness.⁴⁰ Williams notes,

A universal community then, in which each member is more free, more mature, more powerful through what he gives to and receives from every other member, is the best order we can think. It is the real good. It is the meaning of the Kingdom of God for human experience. The will to this community and the spirit in which we intend it and receive it is love.⁴¹

The transforming power of love. We fall short, in the church, of realizing the aim of a community of love. Yet we have seen in the Process story that creation is still a continuing process. The forms of the world are continually being transformed as God seeks to persuade the world to actualize new, higher levels of value and mutuality. Yet there are still many forces at work which break in violently upon our lives, defeating our efforts to achieve

⁴⁰Daniel Day Williams, File Heading: "Doctrine of the Church" Second Folder, (unpublished notes, Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont nd.)

⁴¹Williams, God's Grace, p. 79.

true community. God's work is still unfinished and we cannot assume that whatever happens is the will of God. Our faith in the divine power is not that evil can always be prevented, but that God's love will preserve value and transform the consequences, even of real evil, to allow the emergence of new good. Williams sees hope that the community of love is still emerging, in the experience of God's transforming love. There are, he states, four ways in which this power is experienced in our lives.⁴²

First, we may experience the 'wrath of God.' This is not wrath in the sense of human vindictiveness. Rather, it is the consistent functioning of the requirements of love. Evil, which defies the basic structural requirements for the life of love, sets in motion a train of events, which lead to misery and destruction. It is not God's will that we suffer, but suffering results from the self-destruction inherent in evil.

Second, while the destructiveness of evil is real, we experience God's transforming power in the transmutation of evil and loss into new good and higher levels of fulfillment. The experience of evil in human life, from whatever source, has real impact on our lives. Values which are lost are not recovered and limitations imposed are not removed. God does not reach back into the past and change what has been. This is not possible. However, God, in perfect

⁴²Ibid., p. 53-56.

awareness of and relatedness to the universe as a whole, is able to offer new possibilities for good which can emerge out of the past which contains aspects of evil. Therefore, while God does not will evil for human beings, it may be used by God when it occurs, to create new awareness, sensitivity or power to release new good.

Third, God's transforming power is experienced in the preservation of the values of life and personality from the destruction of time and death. The good of life does change with time and life as we understand it does end in death. However, both faith and experience reveal that something of the past is embodied in the future. Each moment passes from the present to take its place in eternity and becomes selectively embodied in new experiences of the present. The same God who seeks to transform evil, cherishes and preserves the good. We do not know what possibilities lie beyond this life, but we can discern from our experience that our hope consists of having some relation to the future which fits into the stream of eternity and preserves the real values of the past. Most importantly this hope offers meaning for life in this world. We can work toward the good without the futile sense that it is all up to us. God struggles with us, around us, and beyond us, cherishing and, in some sense, preserving, all the good that is actualized.

Fourth, we experience God's transforming power in forgiveness. This forgiveness is not an event, but rather

an enduring aspect of God's love. It is always present, though not always experienced. The experience of forgiveness is relational. Williams states,

We come to know the forgiveness of God primarily through those personal relationships in which love is experienced as a mercy in which we are moved by a power greater than ourselves . . . our knowledge of God's forgiveness does not depend upon a private and subjective illumination of the individual believer alone. It arises in the shared experience of the community of those who through Jesus of Nazareth and what followed upon his life have discovered that God stands by men even when man is in the wrong. To stand by the wrongdoer and to suffer redemptively the consequences of his wrong is the meaning of forgiveness.⁴³

Summary and Conclusions

The Process story, as outlined here, speaks to the questions raised in Chapter 2 regarding what is needed in a modern story. "Do we need the story form for meaningful existence?" "Can we re-establish a paradigm for contact with a reference point beyond ourselves?" and, "What is important enough in our stories that we feel compelled to share it with others?" Likewise, the Process story addresses the specific concerns of liberal protestantism. It maintains our contact with the divine reality while supporting the stance of critical openness to truth from multiple traditions. In summary, let us examine how the Process story relates to each of the above concerns.

In Chapter 2, we noted that the story form is basic

⁴³Ibid., p. 55.

to the rhythmic, episodic nature of our lives. The Process story performs a mythic function by providing a paradigm for our story forms in the idea of process. The Process story takes account of our real experiences in the world and orders them in acknowledgment of the reality of constant change and evolutionary development. It allows for our experienced reality of our own power and self-determination as participants in creating our own stories. Yet it also relates us to the forces of good and evil which function within us and beyond us.

Hence, the Process story offers us a paradigm for relationship to a reference point beyond our individual selves, in the form of God. We find an absolute standard for good, and conversely for evil, in the ideal aim of God. This aim finds expression, however, in the specific aims of God which are conditioned by the real circumstances in which they are offered. In this way we are offered the continuous opportunity for responsive dialogue with God who seeks to have us actualize the community of love. We experience God's call in the same ways we experience other things, by immediate communication, or by communication mediated through forms. The decisive form in which God has made the divine aim known is in Jesus Christ and what followed upon his life. Today that message is carried and preserved in the church as it struggles to actualize the community of love. God, however, works not only in the church, but in all things, everywhere, to achieve the ideal aim. As

persons with power and a high degree of self-determination, we are confronted by the demands of love in all that we do, and are always faced with the choice of responding, or not, to God's call as we are able to discern it.

The Process story organizes and illuminates our experience to ground the most meaningful aspects of our lives in the basic structures of the universe. It affirms the importance of individuals, since individual beings are essential to the community of love. Each person, as a being with power and freedom, is important to the realization of God's aims and is, at least in large measure, the product of God's loving will to create the community of love. The relationships of human beings with God, with each other, and with the various creatures that compose the creation all stem from the lure of the aim of God and provide us with meaning and values in life. The continuing love of God, which brought us into being, calls us to share in the ongoing creation, forgives us when we turn away, and transforms our sin into new possibilities for good, provides our lives with hope. Our hope and our faith rest on the belief, and experience, of God's offering the possibility of ever-renewed relationship in love as exemplified in Christ.

The liberal protestant concern for critical, tentative acceptance of truth claims, and openness to the possibility of truth being found in multiple traditions, is supported by the Process story. God's ideal aim is understood to be unchanging, yet its full meaning and scope is

not available to us. We can only grasp an incomplete notion of its fullness as it applies to our human lives and circumstances. We can grasp more fully the patterns emerging from God's specific aims which reveal something of the nature of true good to us. Likewise, we can grasp the self-disclosure of God in Christ which informs us about the realization of love in human form. In each instance, however, what we observe are conditioned and relative expressions of God's aim. The changing of circumstances changes both our perspective and the specific aims God will set forth. Hence, what we hold to be true and good must always be seen as a conditioned understanding.

The pervasiveness of God's activity in the Process story shows that no one trajectory of history will contain all the truth. God works through all events to bring about a universal community. We can, therefore, expect to find traces of God's presence in all traditions. We will also expect that the course of history has conditioned the expression of God's aims in each case so that we will find different aspects of the divine aim represented in different situations. Some historic paths will clearly reveal one thing but obscure another, yet in each there is some trace of God's action. The Christian tradition holds that, in the life of Jesus, God offers the fullest self-disclosure possible in human form. It is the message of this revelation which brings the church into being and which defines its task.

In the next chapter we will look at the educational task of the church. We will examine the educational use of story and the role of the church as the teller of the Christian story. Some practical applications of the insights of Process are suggested to bring that story to life in the liberal protestant setting, and the concluding summary of the project is made.

Chapter 4

THE CHURCH AS A STORYTELLER

The Problem of Inert Ideas

"One fine Sunday some of us stopped going to Mass, not because Catholic dogma seemed to us all of a sudden false but because the people who went began to bore us and we were drawn to the company of those who stayed away."¹ Thus Ignazio Silone notes the beginnings of his drift away from the Catholic church. It was a revolt, he noted, which was characterized by the choice of comrades. It was not that the church he left behind was offering a false view of his world but rather that the church did not see or speak to his new world at all. Silone's experience was that a new world, populated with interesting people and ideas, had reached out and chosen him to be a participant. This was a social event, an exercise of the heart, rather than an act of the intellect. The ideology of his new companions was learned not because of its greater truth but because it offered access to the new world of his friends. The old ideas of the mass were no less true for him, but his experience of the community that acknowledged

¹Ignazio Silone, "The Choice of Comrades," Encounter, III: 6 (December 1954), 24.

the world view of the mass offered no new and interesting possibilities for relationship.

Alfred North Whitehead offers some insights into the problems Silone's experience presents to the church. Why has the church become a bore? The problem, we might infer from Whitehead, comes from the presentation of inert ideas.² These are ideas which bear no useful relationship to other ideas or activities of the receiver's mind. They are information with no use or application to the task of living and relating which occupy our minds and toward which we direct our attention. When our experience is confronted with large amounts of seemingly pointless material, we naturally seek other sources of experience. If, as we saw in Chapter 2, the church offers a world view which does not correspond to that of our secular experience, we are confronted with a choice. Which ideas offer the tools for relationship and which are inert? In our society it is not possible to participate in the main stream of the world which sustains us physically and not share at least a significant part of its world view. This does not mean that modern people must consider the teachings of the church false. It means rather that they must be maintained as true without a plausible foundation consistent with the rest of life or that they become irrelevant to the real interests of life.

² Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 1.

The Place of Education in the Church

As we saw in Chapter 3, the liberal protestant church, which has largely accepted a secular world view, can recover its Christian heritage in terms which not only accept the modern world but which reach beyond it to account for both the sacred and secular aspects of life. The Process view offers the hope of understanding the world of physical and spiritual realities in terms of the same story again. The concept of story, here, is useful because it creates an artificial unit which we can use as objective data to symbolize our relationships to each other and the world. The kind of story out of which we live and which establishes the relatedness of things in terms of origins, meanings, causes and effects falls into the anthropological category of myth. Thus we might say that in Process theology the liberal protestant church finds its myth, and so must assume the task of the storyteller who passes on one's people's world view.

This is an educational task, yet not one confined to the classroom only. While the formal educational setting of structured learning experiences will be the major concern of this chapter, there are two other major areas in the life of the church which are vital to its educational task and need to be touched upon. These function in concert with formal education to offer the wholeness of community which the nature of the church demands if it is to respond to its call as understood in Process theology.

Worship is the heart of the Christian community and often serves as a learning situation. In its deepest nature, however, worship is at least a distinct form of education from that which occurs in the classroom. If we assume the Lord's Supper to be the focal point of our worship we can better understand this distinction. The Lord's Supper is an act of memory and hope combined in an experience of celebration. It is not a mental exercise, it does not involve research by its participants, or formulation of new concepts. It is the re-experiencing of an accomplished fact in our lives which assumes and confirms a supposed pre-understanding of the story it celebrates. The story of the Last Supper as recited in worship is to recall, not to provide new information. Worship then, involves the repetition of ritual acts by which we identify ourselves as part of a body of beliefs. From a Process perspective this means the recalling of decisive data in our common story by which we determine our relatedness to God and others. It is a process in history in which we seek to harmonize the present state of our lives in comparison to the symbolic aims of our origin. Preaching, which is often the major focus of worship in protestant churches, often does involve creative cognition, experimental modeling, and instruction and will be considered along with other formal educational opportunities in the church.

Fellowship is another important area of religious education. This is the place where, for most of us, the

validity of a particular church's message is reality-checked. In groups of friends and associates, the vital task of socialization to a community's true values occurs. Enormous amounts of informal learning happens here. There is no way to control or structure these learning experiences with the same degree of reliability that is possible in the classroom. Indeed it would probably not be desirable to do so. The quality of community which emerges freely out of the lives of those who at some level share a particular world view constitutes a valuable picture of that view's real impact on life. If, for instance we claim a goal of universal community but maintain an exclusive community fragmented by cliques, the power of our supposed ideal has not been very persuasive, and we might expect a low level of interest in the story which in theory reveals our meaning as persons. This should lead us to evaluate whether or not our story is in fact rooted in the deepest experiences of human need, or if perhaps some more pressing, short term fulfillment is intervening to block the realization of our most basic needs.

The Role of the Church as a Storyteller

Formal education in the church is itself a varied experience. John H. Westerhoff, III, defines Christian education as, ". . . those deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts of the community of faith which enable

persons and groups to evolve Christian life styles."³ In a broad view this would, of course, include aspects of worship and fellowship as well, but in the narrower view we shall take here this means any deliberate activity of the church community where the fostering of specific learning is a principle aim of the event. We will need to look at the function and impact of the story model and the Process story in particular on these kinds of events to discover how the church can function in the role of storyteller in the liberal protestant Church. This we shall do through three areas of concern; the use of story as an educational tool, four principles proposed by Daniel Day Williams which incorporate the Process perspective into religious education, and finally an exploration of concrete ways in which the insights of the Process-story models might be applied to local church educational programming.

About Stories

Stories relate ideas to life. They help us avoid the presentation of ideas and concepts in ways which make them appear inert. Any story which deals with some experienced reality might serve in some setting as an educational tool. In our examination, however, we shall

³ John H. Westerhoff, III, "Toward a Definition of Christian Education," in A Colloquy on Christian Education (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1972), p. 64.

narrow our focus and explore how the specific genre of folk fairy tales might aid in education. These stories, as exemplified in the tales of the Grimm Brothers, Hans Christian Anderson and others, are chosen because they, more clearly than most other story forms demonstrate three major functions in the learning process: generalization, objectification and simplification. While the plots of fairy tales are seldom true in the sense of corresponding to the objective facts of experience, they do deal with the actual facts of our experience through these three processes in ways that reflect the reality of our human condition. They are stories that mostly concern the experiences of human beings in the shadow lands of our inner hopes and fears.⁴

Folk fairy tales lure their readers with a kind of magical fascination. The magic of the story is not gimmickry or illusion but the remarkable capacity of language to generalize.⁵ Language allows us to conceive of, and do things in our imaginations which are not possible in fact. In fantasy we can use language to dissect, abstract and recombine concepts and qualities in new ways. In the recombination of images, novelty emerges, new solutions arise out of the fantastic world which can in turn be abstracted

⁴J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballentine Books, 1966), p. 9.

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

and returned to the real world. In this process we not only grow in the richness of experience, we become "sub-creators." This, of course, could be an unhealthy activity if it distracted one from coping with the reality of life. For most persons, most of the time, the ability to generalize facilitates and strengthens our coping ability.

The second function demonstrated in the fairy tale is closely related to generalization. This is objectification. This is the process by which we create "things" out of experiences. It is a means of providing distance and separation from that which is intimately a part of one's self so as to see the possibilities of relating to it. Fairy tales offer images which acknowledge the aspects of our personalities. We are affirmed by seeing ourselves objectified in a series of characters which unambiguously represent the experiences which become so confused in our inner world. The forces which work upon us from outside our consciousness become revealed to us in the form of concrete beings which we can know and react to. Bruno Bettelheim notes,

In a fairy tale, internal processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented by the figures of the story and its events.

. . . The fairy tale clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features in it. The unrealistic nature of these tales . . . is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tale's concern is not useful information about the external world, but

the inner process taking place in an individual.⁶

Hence the fairy tale enables one to get in touch with paradigms of the forces at work in one's own life and may disclose how to live with them. This is not to say that this information has no impact on relationship to the external world of the individual. The fairy tale's characters portray both moral and physical forces in life. The use of these stories can be effective in instilling an early awareness of good and evil and moral action which can profoundly influence a child's social development and recall archetypal values to adult minds. Significantly, however, the fairy tale seldom makes moral demands of its listeners, it only suggests courses of action through its own resolution of conflict.⁷ Even so a good deal of information can be carried in this way. The principle message of the fairy story, says Bettelheim, is

that struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence--but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.⁸

Third, fairy tales make use of simplification as a way of teaching about life.⁹ Their plots are generally brief, to the point and concentrated on a single conflict. Situations are simplified and figures are clearly described

⁶Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 25.

⁷Ibid., p. 24. ⁸Ibid., p. 8. ⁹Ibid., pp. 8-9.

in their relevant features. The characters tend to be typical, archetypal examples, rather than unique individuals whose characteristics require interpretation. Good and evil are usually clearly and unambiguously personified and, while danger and struggle are real, goodness is finally victorious. Thus the complex subtleties of real life are set aside to create a laboratory situation of limited variables while basic forces of attraction and repulsion are allowed to move within us and reflect upon our own character.

To some degree these three functions are at work in all stories, even those primarily intended to convey information about the external world. The importance of the relationship each of these functions has with our internal world is significant however. This importance is clarified when we take note of how experience is actualized in Process. An occasion of experience is formed from the totality of the past available to us. Out of this data we select, for each moment of experience, that which best seems to offer the possibility of an enjoyable experience. These bits of the past are then incorporated into the reality of a new moment of experience, complete with its own memories and hopes to be passed forward as data for the next moment of experience. Information, as so many isolated facts, has no relevance to this process. As Whitehead noted, it is inert. Only as it relates to experience does this information become important, that is,

likely to be selected for incorporation into future experience. Generalization, objectification and simplification are ways of looking at the process of selection. We tell stories then not simply to pass on information or simply because they remind us of ourselves, but rather we pass on information in story form and find it revealing because it is a process by which we evaluate the relationship of ideas to ourselves. Story is a way of coping with the world of and beyond our immediate experience.

In the church, then, story becomes a way of coping with the world of meaning which confronts us at each stage of our physical and emotional development. Story can cast ultimate questions in forms that have significance for our everyday lives and suggest answers that, though incomplete, permit us to live with meaning and purpose. The world tells us many stories. The advantage of the Process story is that it provides a framework large enough to include the others, while at the same time offering an intimate story of how a human being can live in meaningful relationship to the vast and sometimes hostile powers encountered in life. The church is the community of "The Story." Yet my story is important too, and as I am enabled to see the content and dynamics of "The Story" as normative for my own, I become a part of the church community.¹⁰ "The Story"

¹⁰ Robert McAfee Brown, "Story and Theology," in Philosophy of Religion and Theology: 1974. (Preprinted papers for the Section on Philosophy of Religion and Theology for the American Academy of Religion, 1974 Annual Meeting), pp. 58-59.

expands my story and leads me beyond where I would go of myself, while my story adds to the totality of "The Story." This is our task as Christian educators, notes Williams, to help internalize the story of Jesus into our lives. To provide a theological framework for this task he proposes four principles.¹¹

Four Principles of Christian Education

First, Williams states: "A given historical revelation and tradition are at the foundation of the life of the Christian church. Christian education involves the introduction of growing persons to this tradition with its scripture, its history, its doctrines, and its liturgy." This, of course, cannot be given in the form of isolated facts but rather must be woven into the fabric of experience. The history and traditions of the church cannot be "things" in the community of love. They are the story which, like Silone's new friends, reaches out and chooses us to be participants in the very process of our becoming. Learning data about the church is not the aim of Christian education, but rather participation in the fulfillment of life it makes possible. Yet the form of the church--its history, scriptures, doctrines and liturgy--carries the message of that new life. Again, like Silone, we should

¹¹Daniel Day Williams, "Theological Aspects of Christian Education," Religious Education, LVII: 2 (March-April 1962), 86-87.

find it desirable to learn the ideology of that which chooses us, which demonstrates its relatedness to us, in order to gain access to the new world we are offered.

This is an individual task, since the meaning of faith must be worked out in relation to each person's particular circumstances. However, this is not a relationship between a person and a set of ideas or ideals but a relationship between myself as who I am and the person of Christ as the decisive revelation of God. This is a responsive relationship in which I discover who I really am. This does not happen in isolation but in interaction with the community of the church who share with me their own humanity and act as the body of Christ. When we are able to find the meaning of our lives through Christ we are free to respond to the insistent call of love in our lives.¹²

William's second principle states that: "Interpreting the Christian faith requires a continuing faithfulness to its historical character, and an acknowledgment of the special problems which arise from the fact that the revelation of God is never appropriated apart from fallible human minds." The historical setting of Christian truth is not identical with the message it carries. However, if we are to understand that message we must place it in context.

¹²John B. Cobb, Jr., Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 33.

If we are to be faithful to the message in our modern context we must be able to interpret the historical setting. What parts of the story are outworn cultural patterns, which are speculations of ancient people and which constitute the essential truth which still speaks to our human condition? We need to acknowledge that our scripture, our history, our doctrines, indeed all the forms which serve as vehicles for God's message of grace are conditioned by the historical process and thus are imperfect manifestations of God's intent. Thus not only do we need to transmit the message as it has been provided for us, but also the process by which it has come to us. Further all that we offer as information should be placed within the framework of continuing discussion of God's truth rather than a frozen dogma.

This means that our religious education need not fear questions, change and innovation where those things enhance the fuller understanding of the aims of God. Yet change for change's sake is no advantage. Change should arise out of the growth of sensitivity which permits us to respond more fully to God's call. Thus the patterns of belief and structures which enhance our awareness ought not be discarded lightly. Where we have no sensitivity we have no experience.¹³ A large part of our educational

¹³ Daniel Day Williams, God's Grace and Man's Hope (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 49.

task, then, is to develop sensitivity to the call of love in our lives, to enable persons, and the church as an institution to avoid the inertia of outworn forms resisting growth on one side and change which seeks to limit growth, for the sake of selfish advantage, on the other.

This leads us to the third of Williams' principles. "The truth of the Christian faith is historically conditioned; yet its contemporaneity must be made clear. The primary demand here is to relate the assertions of Christian faith to the questions which arise out of our life situations." We do not need to become "like Jesus" the first century Jewish man. His life and his solutions to problems remain in his own time. Within his story, however, still lives the decisive revelation of God which comes to us as the basis for perceiving God's aim for us in our place and our time. In seeking to make the gospel message available to us while avoiding the imposition of its historical trappings Williams notes three dangers which often limit the church's effectiveness.¹⁴ First, restating the issues of modern life and doing nothing about them. Second, failure to learn from present conflicts and experiences, thus not hearing what the spirit seeks to work out in the forms of the church. And third, loss of the real wisdom of the past through failure to keep clarifying and

¹⁴ Daniel Day Williams, File Heading: "The Church-- Doctrine I," (unpublished notes, Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont nd.)

examining our commitments.

When our educational process offers information isolated from action it denies the most meaningful relationships which content has for life. It is, for instance, fine to speak about loving relationships, but this content has far greater meaning if it can be learned in the experience of giving and receiving love. This is a matter of involvement and commitment of persons to other persons. This is why the story of Jesus can be so motivating. It is a paradigm of the action of love in human form.

Williams' fourth principle states, "All Christian education should be either preparation for decision or confrontation with it." Only in decision does one truly participate in the reality of the story of God's grace. Only in this way does one begin to make "The Story" his or hers. The process of decision requires the selection of data from the past which affirms one particular trajectory over others. Thus the story of God's emerging love becomes our own when we begin to give it formative power in our choices. We begin to conform our will to that of God. This means the full exercise of our freedom, the risk of love, the demand for continuous inquiry and the willingness to experience the judgment of love upon our way of life.

Christian education, then, is education in decision making. We are not called to imitate another's acts or conform to a particular set of rules or answers. Rather we are called to act in ways which responsively actualize love,

whether or not that is the motivation we feel, in preference to the other possibilities our experience offers us.¹⁵

God's call places insatiable demands on our lives yet the constant presence of God's love sustains and forgives without limits or condition.¹⁶ Thus we need not fear to act in accordance with our best understanding of the demands of love. We know we often fail, and that our successes in themselves will usually not change the world in any great or lasting degree, but by acting in love we have become a part of the enduring story of God's transformation of the whole universe. Our educational experiences need to reflect the importance of participation in this dynamic story and offer a community of support for those who choose, even in small ways, to run the risk of love.

A picture of religious education is emerging here for the liberal protestant church. We have based our model on the concept of story. The Process story provides both content for understanding our relationship to God and the world, and a paradigm for organizing our own story. The task of education for the church is to facilitate the process of incorporating the story of the actualization of God's aim into our own stories such that it can exercise causal influence in our decisions. In this process we must seek to present the history of the church and its message with as much responsiveness to the experiences of the past,

¹⁵Cobb, p. 112.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 40.

and of our listener's present, as possible. We must seek to open the meaning of the historically conditioned data of God's action in the past to the experiences of the present in order that we might facilitate sensitivity to the call of God's continuing action in the world. Finally we must present the revelation of God's love in such a way that its demands upon us are clear and we are led to act decisively and responsively in the world. These demands run through all our educational endeavors, in preaching, teaching, facilitating, training, counseling, wherever we are called upon to apply the gospel message to life.

A Pattern for Religious Instruction

We now turn to the activity of the local church and more concrete application of the model above. Of course it would be impossible to offer specific suggestions for every local situation, every age level, or every kind of educational activity. Rather let us examine a three-fold, general process for local programming which uses the insights of Process and story. The process consists of representation, interaction, and evaluation, all of which happen simultaneously to some degree, but with a sequential emphasis on each in order.

We begin with representation. This is the task of planning and curriculum development, by which we intend to build a representation of our content. Content in this model is to be woven into a story which relates its meaning

to the lives of those who participate in the experience. Several things are implied here in relation to goal setting, responsiveness of curriculum, team building among the leadership, and the evaluation of learning which takes place.

Robert Mager, in the Preface to Preparing Instructional Objectives, notes, ". . . if you're not sure where you're going, you're liable to end up someplace else--and not even know it."¹⁷ Mager proposes that we set out our goals in terms of accomplishing specific, measurable, achievable objectives. In this way we have a pattern to follow in education telling us where we intend to go, how we plan to get there and what will have happened or be happening when we get there. In the church there has been opposition to Mager's views on the basis that it does not account for novelty or individuality in problem solving and that much of what is learned in religion is of a subjective nature and not measurable by objective criteria. The Process view offers some support to this view. In our instruction we must make allowances for the freedom of individuals. We must be prepared for novel circumstances and events to take us places we had not planned to go. Further it is always the case that learning is subjective. However, we might still learn a good deal from what Mager proposes. It might be acceptable to wind up someplace we hadn't planned on going, but at least we should know it when it happens.

¹⁷Robert F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Belmont, CA: Fearon, 1962), p. vii.

We have often been too lax in the church about goal setting, resulting in the fact that too often we have gone nowhere at all. The Process view, as set forth in Williams' principles, makes two things clear about goal setting. One, we must be faithful to the best scholarship available to us. And two, we must set our goals to relate God's story to our story. We do not offer effective Christian education unless we do both. These, however, are principles, not specific goals. God's aim for us in each moment is for us to actualize the best possibility to bring about the community of love. This is, in each occasion, a specific goal. We cannot set educational goals for all the significant occasions of life, but we can set them for those events we have control over. The Process story provides us guidelines to determine the shape of our goals. We need to respond to the requirements for a community of genuine love and to be aware of how our activities function in the interaction of spirit and forms.

The task of representation, then involves use of curriculum materials which respond to the needs of persons seeking the community of love. Inevitably people will arrive at an experience with a variety of perspectives on what this means. This makes the task of selecting curricula very difficult. Assuming the materials available represent the best scholarship current, an assumption which is not likely always to be true, there is still the problem of presentation in a form which meets people in their own

stories. This problem is partially overcome through familiarity with one's class members, but this is not an adequate solution. The problem is further limited by involving members of a class in the preparation and presentation of the material. This at least guarantees the involvement of some members of the class in what is happening even if the content of the curriculum is unimportant to them. Here is a key: people are engaged in activity in a class whether or not it relates to the subject of the class. People are always busy living. Goals, then, need to be conformed to the activities of life which are occupying the class members. Thus, classes need to be structured to enable the maximization of freedom and input by all members of the class. The role of instructor becomes that of facilitator to help the process, resource to inform the process, and guarantor to protect the process. The role of guarantor seeks to keep God's aim before the class both as a lure toward the community of love and as the judgment of love upon the actions of all. These are skills to be acquired rather than prerogatives to protect, and in the well-functioning educational experience they will be shared by many, if not all in the class, in varying degrees. A class or any group of learners which truly functions in this way should, itself, come to represent the lure of the community of love in the process of becoming.

Effective use of this style of education requires

a high level of leadership training and support, and free flowing, supportive feedback on success and failure. In part, this should be built into each activity. Those with the highest level of involvement in an area of concern should feel the freedom to enter into the leadership process (This is distinct from being "used" as a resource), to help process the data produced by the group at large, and coordinate the representation of the gospel message to meet the needs of all. The pattern suggested below is not the only way to do this, or necessarily the best way for any particular situation or group. It does, however, offer a model for "interaction activities" in the educational process. The essential point of this model is that there must be some concrete way to get from where we are at the beginning to where we want to be at the end. We may not end up where we planned, but at least we will be able to compare what we thought should have happened, what did happen, and why the two are different. What is proposed here is a six step process in which we seek to incorporate the message of the Christian story, or some aspect of it, into some aspect of our own story.¹⁸

1. We begin with discovery. This is not actually

¹⁸While this process is derived from my own experiences, I am deeply indebted to many helpful friends and associates at the First United Methodist Church of La Mesa, California, who helped me, often unknowingly in putting this together while I served on the staff, and as a lay worker there.

the beginning since this model forms a cycle, but the beginning of the cycle is to discover some common ground in an event, issue, or idea. Discovery takes place in exploring the depth and breadth of actual experiences of the subject. The intent is to involve as many persons as possible in sorting out and uncovering their relationship to the topic: "This is what I think. . ." or "Someone told me. . ." or "This happened to me. . ." or "I don't see why people care about this." In the discovery activities persons begin to share a small bit of their story, a few causes, effects and relationships which make them known as individuals to other persons and adds to a growing pool of common experience. These activities need not produce a consensus or a correct answer. Their primary purpose is in interaction and enrichment of our pool of experiences of each other.

2. With a common experience of discovery behind us, we move to a group experience of representation. This is not identical to the process of representation which should occur as a plan in preparation for the learning experience but, similarly is an interaction between curriculum, resource persons or input experiences, and the group as a whole. This experience restates the issue or topic in terms of some aspect of the story of God's love. The input of this new experience or information offers the lure of the fulfilled life in the community of love, and confronts us with the judgment of love on our own actions. This

process is not to condemn people for the things they have discovered about themselves, or to provide the "right answer." Rather, the point is to recast the situation in terms that introduce the tools of the gospel message, for instance the transforming power of love, or the qualities of Jesus' love, for us to use in our own actions.

3. With the advantage of this new information we move to a creative process of modeling. This is a stage for fantasy: "If I really took this seriously I would. . ." or "Here are some new ways I can see this. . ." or "These are choices I have never tried before." Here we hope for new insights to emerge, or at least for real insight from the past to be reaffirmed. We create paradigms for action, and for our world view, in the context of community which has shared part of us and which shares a story that claims us all. Our insights can be reality checked against the experience of others, and our actions can be tested to see if their impact matches our intent.

4. Having tested some fantasy models we can return to the reality of our actual experience, and engage in contracting for action. The contracting process involves integration of the data from previous activities into what seems to be a workable plan for real life. It also involves decision at several points: "I have decided to do this. . ." and "I have decided to tell you I will do this. . ." and "I have decided to enlist your help in holding me accountable. . . ." While the actual contracting can take numerous

forms, it basically states a commitment, preferably on the part of individuals, to engage in some group or private activity, and gives the group, or some individuals, the right to monitor these actions. This is the point where, if one seriously enters into this process, a person must decide whether or not the group is to be allowed inside his, or her life. This process requires the involvement of persons in the lives and actions of others. Here is a critical point for observation as to what actually is happening in terms of group relationships and commitment to the tasks we talk about. The experiences of this section should provide valuable material to recycle back into future discovery sections.

5. Once contracts have been made, they should be carried out, in some form of action. Too often we perpetuate the notion of having solved a problem by defining it, when we don't subject ourselves to accountability for following through on our commitments. Action is as vital as decision. This experience may involve complex projects requiring large amounts of time or take only a few moments. There is a three-fold objective to the use of action. First, it emphasizes the correspondence of decision and activity which is needed if the message of the church is to gain formative power in life and society. Second, it is hoped that some intended benefit would arise out of the actions performed. Third, but not the least important, is the realization that action aimed at the solution of a

problem is different from actually solving it. Action produces data. That data may tell us we have done the wrong thing. This too is learning and can, by creative transformation advance the cause of good.

6. The final step in this process is evaluation. This is not simply a matter of looking at what happened in the action phase. This activity also involves the element of recovery and renewal. Here the community affirms the action which has been taken in response to the call of God. This is the time of celebration, and transformation. We have acted, we are new, the world is new. It is a time of recognition of God's presence with us in the suffering of defeat and in the support of sustaining love. Here we see our limits, and experience once again the call of God. This is a time for the community to discover who it is in relation to the story of love. It is a time to worship, and return to begin the pattern again in discovery.

Following representation of the subject through planning and interaction with resources and curriculum materials, a leadership activity, and interaction in the educational process, a group activity, we turn to the leadership evaluation of the total procedure. Evaluation of activities in religious education is characteristically plagued by several problems which tend to limit our ability to learn from our experiences. We tend to be uncertain at the outset what it is we are trying to achieve in concrete terms. We tend to accept the idea that because much of

religious education involves subjective experience we cannot measure it. Similarly, we have developed few objective criteria to serve as a basis for success. Finally we seldom schedule both time and energy to allow serious evaluation. As a consequence we tend to cast our evaluations in terms of numbers present and how people seemed to feel about what happened. These are important measures, but in themselves do not indicate whether or not any progress has been made in facilitating the formative power of the gospel message in the life of a group or its individuals. If we expect to make a real and meaningful impact we should expect observable changes in patterns of behavior and interaction. These should occur both at the group and individual level. The specific criteria and measurements for evaluation, of course, must arise out of a group's own experience in relation to their understanding of the demands of the universal community of love. What follows are suggested lists of observable criteria for evaluation in both the areas of group and individual growth.¹⁹

¹⁹These lists are adapted from ones compiled in 1974 as part of a study group consisting of The Rev. Mr. N. Robert Kesler, former senior minister of the First United Methodist Church of La Mesa, California, The Rev. Mr. O. Maxwell Graham, minister of education at that church, and myself. The list used here as criteria for group evaluation originated from a set of criteria for experiential celebration.

Possible Criteria for Observation in Group Activities

1. Involvement leads toward ownership of the process.
2. Leadership is oriented toward training (resource development) and surrender of control of the process to the community.
3. Content is experienced immediately (without intermediate steps) rather than being "learned about." Learning is experienced through the event.
4. Experiential events are "reality checked" by . . .
 - A. Scripture (accredited guidelines to the experience of ultimate worth).
 - B. Tradition (symbolic enactment or understanding of previous experiences).
 - C. Experience itself (mine and that of others and of the community).
 - D. Reason (internal and external consistency, reliability and parsimony).
 Reality is not seen as one dimensional but includes all of the above criteria, each of which is, itself, validated or invalidated by the others.
5. Group experiences involve the whole person, sensory, physical, mental, social, spiritual.
6. World view is unified, not separated into spiritual and profane domains.
7. Programming is flexible, person-oriented rather than task-oriented.
8. Programming facilitates an increasing level of group interaction in terms of personal sharing, listening and truth seeking.

Possible Criteria for Observation of Individual Characteristics

1. Self-awareness
 - A. Demonstration of self-image through body language and care of one's physical being.
 - B. Broadening of response patterns and categories for self-expression.
 - C. Openness about the multiple dimensions of one's being.

- D. Ownership of feelings, ideas, action, abilities, and mistakes.
 - E. Ability to concentrate attention on the present experience.
 - F. Ability to give and receive constructive feedback.
2. Other-awareness
- A. Ability to tend others with listening and sharing skills.
 - B. Positive orientation toward relationships--lessening of "put-downs," and "negative intimacy."
 - C. Increased flexibility in acceptance of differences.
 - D. Decreased use of stereotyping, more interpersonal and intergenerational acceptance.
 - E. Willingness to share power and responsibility co-operatively for benefit of the community.
 - F. Intentional use of communication skills.
 - G. Willingness to take risks in the community through sharing of resources, and experimenting with new forms of behavior and interaction.
 - H. Ability to relate the tools of faith to the real situations of life.
 - I. Investment in community-building as observed in outreach, identification with community goals and concern exhibited for others.
 - J. Reliability and faithfulness to commitments to other persons.

These, like any procedures or tools for evaluation must keep in perspective the relationships of spirit and form if the growth of mutuality is to be served. Our tools must serve as instruments to uncover love's judgment of our actions, they cannot be ends in themselves. They must serve the requirements of love or they will surely hinder its actuality. The evaluation of Christian education is itself a part of the community's learning process and like any other activity should provide an opportunity for support, enjoyment, and transformation. Its purpose is never to find fault but to redirect our path toward the reality of our common goal.

Summary and Conclusion

Each of us lives out of a story which relates us to the values we hold. In this project we have looked at the dilemma of liberal protestantism, caught in the conflict between the modern world view and that of the traditional Christian story. We have examined how story functions in human life as a means of organizing and expanding our awareness of the world and have seen how the problems may have arisen which cause many people today to reject the view presented in the traditional Christian story.

The mythical functions of the traditional Christian story have served to ground a large part of our modern world view, yet as the growth of technology and secularization have occurred certain elements of that myth have been undermined or abandoned. Perhaps the most important of these is the concept of a transcendent, all-powerful God who could serve as the source of reality, author of life and final judge of human action. This concept of God, as illustrated in the traditional drama of creation, fall and redemption of humanity became isolated from the mainstream of Western thought, which was moving toward secular technology. Eventually, the idea of such a God became irrelevant to many people.

In the liberal protestant tradition the problem of conflict between the two views of the world becomes focused, as liberal protestantism claims both traditions and seeks to

subject each to open and critical analysis. In this way, the liberal protestant position comes to function as a parable for the myth systems of both traditional Christianity and the modern world. When parables raise irreconcilable conflicts within a myth system, they force the emergence of a new myth which should offer a more adequate world view. It is the contention of this paper that this is what has occurred in the emergence of Process theology and that this theology provides a theoretical basis for a functional story out of which liberal protestants can live in the modern world and still proclaim the essential message of the gospel. This story also provides a methodology for the proclamation of the message of the church through education.

The church, as understood in the Process story, emerges out of the experiences of Jesus' followers, who were transformed by the events of, and following, his life. The church is the particular form in history which bears the message of Jesus' revelation. The action of God perceived in and through the life of Jesus reveals the meaning of the community of love in human form, illustrates the requirements for genuine love to exist, and demonstrates the transforming power of love. The spirit of God works in and beyond the forms of the church as the body of Christ in the world today to bring about the fulfillment of the loving community.

The educational task of the church is to be

responsive to the action of the spirit as we seek to help persons connect their story to "The Story" of God's love. How this task is performed is examined through an exploration of the use of story as an educational tool to relate ideas to life. Further, we examined educational principles proposed by Daniel Day Williams which reflect the insights of Process theology and guide our use of story. Briefly, Williams proposed that in our Christian education we must introduce persons to the Christian tradition as interpreted through history by fallible minds. He also proposed that this tradition, though historically conditioned, has contemporary relevance which must be made clear and applied in life through decision and action. Finally, a proposal is made for a pattern of religious instruction in the liberal protestant church which makes use of the methodology of story and the principles Williams sets forth. The aim of this proposal is to produce observable changes in the character and activity of persons and groups within the church, seeking to move toward the actualization of the community of love.

The community toward which we strive, the universal community of free, mature, powerful, loving persons, is far from a reality. There is really no educational technique to produce it. The work of love is the work of God's grace which lures us on to risk participation in the ever-continuing creation of community. Daniel Day Williams

concludes, "The search for communion makes the adventure of the mind worth its cost."²⁰ We cannot pass on "the final answers" in Christian education but we can pass on the joy of searching together in communion with God, who struggles with us and beyond us.

²⁰Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 301.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

- Berger, Peter L. The Sacred Canopy. Garden City: Doubleday, 1969.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment. New York: Knopf, 1975.
- Cobb, John B., Jr. Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.
- _____, and David Ray Griffin. Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.
- Crossan, John Dominic. The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story. Niles, IL: Argus, 1975.
- Dunne, John S. The Way of All the Earth. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- Griffin, David Ray. A Process Christology. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.
- Keen, Sam. To a Dancing God. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Mager, Robert F. Preparing Instructional Objectives. Belmont, CA: Fearon, 1962.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. The Aims of Education. New York: Macmillan, 1929.
- Williams, Daniel Day. God's Grace and Man's Hope. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.
- _____. The Spirit and the Forms of Love. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Zablocki, Benjamin. The Joyful Community. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971.

B. ANTHOLOGIES

- Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader, ed. by Wendell C. Beame and William G. Doty. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy Stories," in The Tolkien Reader. New York: Ballantine Books, 1966.

Westerhoff, John H., III. "Toward a Definition of Christian Education," in A Colloquy on Christian Education. Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1972.

C. PERIODICALS

Brown, Robert McAfee. "Story and Theology," in Philosophy of Religion and Theology: 1974. Preprinted papers for the section on Philosophy of Religion and Theology for the American Academy of Religion, 1974 Annual Meeting.

Griffin, David Ray. "Philosophical Theology and the Pastoral Ministry." Encounter, XXXIII: 3 (Summer 1972), 230-244.

Silone, Ignazio. "The Choice of Comrades." Encounter, III: 6 (December 1954), 21-28.

Williams, Daniel Day. "Theological Aspects of Christian Education." Religious Education, LVII: 2 (March-April 1962), 86-87.

D. COLLECTED PAPERS

Williams, Daniel Day, Collected Papers, under file heading "Doctrine of the Church" first folder, at the Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont (unpublished - n.d.)

Williams, Daniel Day, Collected Papers, under file heading "Doctrine of the Church" second folder, at the Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont (unpublished - n.d.)

Williams, Daniel Day, Collected Papers, under file heading "The Church - Doctrine I" at the Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont (unpublished - n.d.)